

OCTOBER, 1955

IMAGINATION
SCIENCE FICTION

VOL. 6 NO. 8
ISSUE NO. 45

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IMAGINATION
SCIENCE FICTION

OCTOBER, 1955

35¢

ES PERCIPI

by Stephen Marlowe



Introducing the



AUTHOR



Theodore R. Cogswell



THE birthing was normal, so were the next ten years. I came along in the last year of the last war before the war before last in that pre-atomic era when the only mutational agents around were old-fashioned cosmic rays. As a result there was almost a complete dearth of telepaths and espers in the various Pennsylvania, Minnesota, New York and Ohio neighborhoods I successively inhabited. There were, of course, Tarzan and John Carter, but there weren't enough accounts around of the exploits of either to offer a major distraction. On the whole I conducted myself in a manner calculated to reflect credit on American Boyhood. Until it happened, that is.

I don't remember whether it was

an AIR WONDER or a SCIENCE WONDER, but by the time I reached page eighteen I was hooked. After that I went through the usual stages of addiction, just a poor innocent kid who didn't realize what was happening to him. By the time Campbell's ASTOUNDING came arcing over the horizon I was already a confirmed main liner.

Shortly after I got out of high school, I took off for Europe and knocked around there for a year and a half. When I finally came wandering home I found that the science fiction habit — and the depression — was still with me. The next few years found me in and out of the University of Colorado, the quantative relationship between the *out* and *in* being best in-

(Concluded on Page 45)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

OCTOBER
1955

VOLUME 6
NUMBER 8

IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

Stories

DECEMBER ISSUE ON SALE
SEPTEMBER 29th

ES PERCIPI

(Complete Novel)by *Stephen Marlowe* 6
Targoff set out to conquer Earth by selling miracle products—which didn't exist!

THE LAST PLUNGE

(Short Story)by *S. J. Sockett* 46
Sure a man could make money air-lion diving off Uranus—if he lived long enough!

DEADLINE SUNDAY

(Novelette)by *Daniel F. Golouye* 60
Kids all over Earth announced they were going away. But they wouldn't say where!

THE PIONEER

(Novelette)by *Irving Cox, Jr.* 82
Greg had shown Man the way into space—and, ironically, the end of a way of life!

NO GUN TO THE VICTOR

(Short Story)by *Theodore R. Cogswell* 104
Alan loved competitive sport—especially if he were good enough at it to survive!

Features

INTRODUCING THE AUTHOR 2
THE EDITORIAL 4
H-BOMB LIMIT 81
SCIENTIFILM MARQUEE 100

SCIENCE FICTION LIBRARY 115
FANDORA'S BOX 116
LETTERS FROM THE READERS 124
TOMORROW'S SCIENCE 132

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Front cover painting by W. E. Terry, suggesting, "Earthmen Facing Menace On Luna"

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Cartoons by Bill Reid, Luther Scheffy, and R. C. Adair
Back cover astronomical photo, courtesy Mt. Wilson and Palomar Observatories

Published bi-monthly by Greenleaf Publishing Company, 1426 Fowler Avenue, Evanston, Illinois. Entered as second-class matter at the Post Office at Evanston, Illinois. Additional entry at Sandusky, Ohio. Address all communications to IMAGINATION, P. O. Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. We do not accept responsibility for unsolicited manuscripts or art work; submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed return envelopes. Accepted material is subject to whatever revision is necessary to meet requirements, and will be paid for at our current rates. The names of all characters used in stories are fictitious; any resemblance to any person living or dead is coincidental. Copyright 1955 Greenleaf Publishing Company. Subscription rate \$3.00 12 issues. Advertising rates sent upon request. Printed in U.S.A. by Stephens Printing Corp., Sandusky, Ohio.

The Editorial

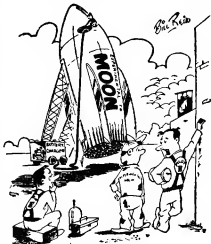
IRONICALLY, we have watched the burgeoning of television with both applause and alarm. Applause because TV is one of science fiction's predictions come true; alarm because many sources in the publishing business have warned that TV will (or has) cut down on the reading time of the general public. If the latter be true then it may seem odd for a science fiction magazine to plug a TV program—and thereby tend to boost an already vast audience and perhaps cut down on our own! Yet, we shall do so. For the TV program we have in mind is science fiction.

WE'RE not speaking of *Superman*, *Space Cadet*, or the like. They're nice for the comic book trade, but hardly the type of stf for a more mature audience. Disregarding the juvenalia, TV has finally come up with a top-notch stf program, **THE SCIENCE FICTION THEATER**. A feature of the National Broadcasting Company, we receive it in the Chicago area on Saturday night at 10:30. A half-hour filmed presentation, it may be seen in your locality at a different time and day, so consult your newspaper TV listings.

SCIENCE FICTION THEATER is an intelligently produced program (with few exceptions) and makes an effort to adhere as closely to scientific principles as possi-

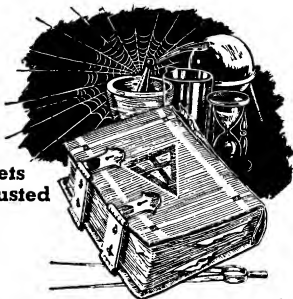
ble. Part of the realism—and success—of this series is undoubtedly due to the narrator of the show, Truman Bradley, who invariably sets the scene dramatically and realistically. What follows is usually a story of high suspense and human interest, with stf themes ranging from telepathy to space travel.

MORE need not be said, except that you should tune in the program this week on your NBC station. You'll see science fiction as it should be handled . . . wth



"Someone left the cigarette lighter pushed in!"

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to a
few**



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The Rosicrucians (AMORC)

SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

Es Percipi

by

Stephen Marlowe

Diplomatic relations became strained when the Targoffian Ambassador started selling miracle products on Earth. Products that didn't exist! . . .

NICHOLSON ducked into the room and squinted myopically through contact lenses which made his eyes look watery and far away. "Better scram out the back way, boss," he said. "That dame from the Department of Health and Public Welfare is here again."

Bryan Channing allowed himself ten seconds of barely audible swearing. Finally, he said, "What does she expect me to do, snap my fingers and make the Ambassador from Targoff disappear?"

"It would be nice," Nicholson admitted.

"Unfortunately," Bryan Channing said for the fifth time that day, "our hands are tied. Sure, Earth can get along without Targoff. The galaxy would hardly know the difference if sub-space opened up a world-sized pocket tomorrow and

swallowed Targoff and its sun."

"But," said Nicholson.

"Yes, but. I'll have to see the old battle-ax sooner or later, Nick. On your way out you might as well tell Julie to send her in."

"Oh, am I leaving?"

"You get the idea," said Bryan Channing. "You discovered Targoff, then dumped it in my lap. One of these days you better find us a planet which will make Health and P. W. happy. Now, beat it."

A moment after Nicholson had departed, the under-secretary of Health and Public Welfare opened the door with a well-manicured hand and followed it into Bryan Channing's office, which looked out on the East River and the dismantling job being done on the Queensboro Bridge through a solid wall of thermoglass.



"I don't smoke and I don't drink on duty," she said primly after Bryan Channing had made the necessary gestures and offerings. "There were twenty-two thousand divorces in the New York Metropolitan Area alone last week, Mr. Channing. I have figures for other locations, if you wish."

"Just let my secretary have them on your way out."

"Very well."

"Incidentally, I don't want to tell you your business, but the figure doesn't seem so alarmingly high."

"Perhaps. How would fifty thousand sound — for the first half of this week?"

"High," said Bryan Channing. "Go ahead."

"Deaths from malnutrition and disease continue at an even more alarming rate. These figures —" And the under-secretary began to remove a sheaf of papers from her briefcase.

"My secretary," Bryan Channing said again. "Can you pin these things directly on Qui Dor?"

"Qui Dor?"

"The Targoffian Ambassador."

"I can only go by his advertisements and what our field workers report after interviews. Qui Dor or whatever his name is, is to blame, it appears. Tell me, Mr. Channing, is it quite regular for a planetary Ambassador to — well, to go into

business like that?"

"Yes and no," Bryan Channing told her, launching himself on his favorite subject. "We don't make the laws, m'am. Fifty different planetary cultures nurtured on fifty different sets of laws with a heritage as rich as our own Roman one — you don't merely stamp out all the existing laws and arbitrarily distribute a new code. All you can do is hope that in some fields at least there is a common meeting point for the planets."

"You've failed to answer my question."

"Sorry. The Lurane Ambassadors are primarily businessmen, out to make a buck for their planet, as the expression goes. The Specixes Ambassador is a glorified emcee trooping around with a bunch of acrobats, dancers and singers. There are no laws which would prohibit Qui Dor —"

"But he's threatening our entire way of life!" cried the under-secretary, no longer prim and diplomatically correct.

"Aren't you exaggerating the situation, m'am?" he asked politely. He wanted to say she was making a mountain not out of a mole hill but a pimple. He wanted to say a lot of things but never did, and realized that was one of the reasons ulcers ran so high in the Department of State. He would settle for some chianti, antipasto and

chicken cacciatore with Ellen in their favorite Italian restaurant, but first he had to placate the emissary from Health and P. W. and keep Nicholson happy at the same time. It hardly seemed possible, for if he knew Nick, the myopic explorer-with-portfolio was eavesdropping on their conversation through the office intercom.

"You think it isn't serious, if our standard of living is threatened by —"

"Let's look at it another way. I mean, it's just not our problem. That's an internal problem for the Department of Health and Public Welfare to solve, m'am."

"You can tell the Targoffian Ambassador to get the hell off our planet. Excuse me."

CHANNING shook his head. "Even if I agreed with you, I couldn't do that. Wouldn't that be perfect grist for the propaganda mills on Sirius and Centauri, not to mention Deneb? Big Brother Earth goes around using all the little planets. Humans break off diplomatic relations with cultures which don't adhere to Earth standards — unless, of course, we could milk something out of them."

"You know that isn't true."

"I'm not standing in judgment on it. I'm merely saying how they would interpret it on Centauri and

Sirius. Not to mention Deneb."

It was Channing's trump card. You didn't argue when someone mentioned Deneb like that. Deneb was the *ne plus ultra* of dangerous interplanetary relations. If something were white on Earth, it was black on Deneb. Unfortunately, Channing knew, there was at least as much truth as fancy in what he said.

"How do the Denebians deal with Targoff?" the under-secretary demanded.

Channing lit his pipe and knew he was in for trouble. "They don't," he said. "Diplomatic relations are not maintained between Deneb and Targoff."

"May I ask you why not? You see, Deneb can get away with it, but we —"

"I'm surprised at you," Channing cut her off. "Earth can't sink to the Denebian level. We've got to set the example. We've got to be a shining light, a beacon, a"

"Those speeches sound fine on television," the under-secretary said, "but I wasn't born yesterday, Mr. Channing. What are you going to do about this situation?"

"Nothing right now. The Secretary of State wants to let matters ride for the time being. The President"

"I'm going to see the President, you know."

"Maybe it's best," Channing ad-

mitted. He was a thirty thousand dollar a year trouble-shooter for the Department of State, running smack-dab into a brick wall.

"You'll hear from me," warned the under-secretary. "You'll hear from the President. This is deplorable."

"Yes, m'am," said Channing, showing her to the door.

Half an hour later, Channing had wilted his whiskers with depilatory, staring all the while at his moody face with the slightly sagging jowls in a desk mirror and wishing he were in some other line of work. The achesonian epithet, it seemed, applied to State Department officials above the level of clerk who had the misfortune of dealing with touchy issues. If Health and P. W.'s Girl Friday had her way, Channing suspected, he would be an ogre by morning.

"DON'T go near the living room," Ellen called from somewhere on the bedroom level of the house, "it's still wet. The maid quit, dear."

"Quit?" Channing hollered back. "What on Earth for?" He settled himself on a web-chair in the study, poured a martini from the decanter Ellen had prepared, and began to thumb through the impressive compilation of figures the under-secretary had left with Julie.

"She's getting married."

"What?" Channing gasped. "Fanny getting married? I don't believe it."

"Honest," said Ellen, entering the room. She was a little pretty woman, dressed in tight black torrero slacks and a fuzzy crimson sweater which Channing thought came from one of the Centauri planets. She was twenty-eight, half a dozen years younger than Channing, with short-cropped chestnut hair and the dimpled smile and attractive legs which aided and abetted a diplomat's career. She knew it and in the best modern fashion they made good use of it.

Ellen sipped from Channing's cocktail glass, poured another for each of them, pecked at his cheek with carmined lips and settled comfortably in his lap. "You see," she said, not looking at him, "someone from Qui Dor enterprises visited us on Monday."

"So now Fanny's getting married. I'll be damned. Say, you didn't take anything from them, did you?"

"You mean like a husband? No-o."

"I mean like anything. And stop kidding."

"Well, yes, I did. Everybody's trying it, dear. I had to. I didn't want to feel — left out."

Channing climbed to his feet, almost dumping his pretty wife on the floor. "All right," he said. "You tell me what you bought."

"You won't be mad?"

"I'm not saying."

"Then I won't tell you."

"Ellen —"

"Promise?"

"O. K. I promise."

Ellen skipped away from him toward the dining room. "Then come on inside and I'll show you."

AFTERWARDS, he could have sworn that Ellen did no cooking. She merely reached into a cabinet adjacent to the electric range, (must get a radar range one of these days, he thought, especially with no more Fanny around and the servant situation being what it was) and came out with the platters, piping hot. "Hey," he'd said between mouthfuls of savory white meat which tasted like a rare Centaurian fowl he had eaten in that interplanetary restaurant on East 48th once, "this is all right." The dessert was Sirius, and brother, what they could do with those whipped toppings. And to finish it all off with the proper pleasant glow, Ellen had even managed to find a bottle of good old French brandy which must have been corked when Napoleon was a boy.

"The devil with Fanny," Channing declared, loosening his belt a notch. "I've got myself quite a cook. Say, if you don't want to tell me about that Qui Dor thing, honey . . ."

"Ha!" Ellen laughed triumphantly. "If that isn't just like a man. Give him something good to eat and he'll be licking the palm of your hand. But I said I'd show you. I already have."

"Huh?"

"You've eaten it. That's what the Qui Dor people sold me, that food cabinet. How to keep a husband, they said. You see, no one can cook that well, not in such variety. Mad at me, dear?"

"No," Channing admitted. "It was delicious, every bit of it" But he patted his slight paunch reflectively. "Sometimes food can be too good, though."

"Listen, big eyes. Qui Dor's food cabinet was made for guys like you. Are you full?"

"Lord, yes."

"There wasn't a single calorie in what you ate. Nor any vitamins, minerals or —"

"I've heard of that," Channing said incredulously. "But, but I've eaten. I know I have. I tasted it, all of it. I felt it going down. I feel full now. I couldn't eat another thing."

"I can't explain that, dear. You know the Targoffian Ambassador personally. Perhaps he can."

"But if there was no food value in any of that stuff, we still haven't eaten dinner."

"You're supposed to eat concentrates first, dear. I just wanted

to surprise you, that's all. Well, how do you like it?"

"I want it out of this house tomorrow," said Channing raising his voice.

"You don't have to holler at me."

"I'm sorry. But that cabinet goes."

"Why? Give me one good reason."

"Because — because it isn't natural. That's why. Not natural."

"And you're supposed to be the broad-minded whiz-kid of the State Department."

"I'm no kid any more."

"Well, that's what they called you. It never hurt anybody on Targoff, did it? This kind of thing?"

"I wouldn't know. I've never been there."

"What did Nicky say?"

"He said Targoff looks like the richest planet he's ever seen, but is really the poorest. He said they have nothing and seem to have everything. He said they don't admit it, though. As far as the Targoffians are concerned, they do have everything."

"Well, do they or don't they?"

"It depends on your point of view," Channing said. "Objectively, they have nothing. Subjectively, they have everything. Point is, the stuff isn't real."

"What do you mean, it isn't real?"

"Say, has Qui Dor or someone been lecturing you? You're really going off on the deep end about this Targoffian business, aren't you?"

"Not Qui Dor, an Earthman, Vienese, I think, working for him. You haven't answered me, dear. I said, what do you mean it isn't real?"

"Well, it — it doesn't exist. It's all in the mind, in the imagination."

"You just ate it. When you looked at it, the food was there. You could smell it and taste it and touch it — if it was hot it burned your hand, Bryan — and you had to chew it and swallow it. If you ate too fast it might even give you an upset stomach."

"But it wasn't real," Channing protested.

"Then what is real? Look at me."

"Um, pretty," said Channing.

"Stop that. Stop trying to change the subject. It's all well and good for you to talk about these things in the office, but you never want to talk about them with me. Touch me. Go on, touch me."

FEELING mildly ridiculous, Channing placed his big hand on the fuzzy red material covering his wife's shoulder. "So what does that prove?" he said.

"Stand up. Turn around."

He stood up, pushing the chair back. He turned around, facing the

entrance to the living room.

"Where am I?"

"Where are you? Right behind me, of course. Sitting down at the table."

"How do you know?"

"I — I just know."

"Are you sure? Can you be sure?"

"I just saw you there, damnit!"

"But you don't see me here now, unless you have eyes in the back of your head, dear. How do you know I'm still here, unless you see me?"

"Because you didn't get up and go away, that's why. I would have heard you."

"How do you know? Maybe I'm only around when you look at me. When you *perceive* me, dear. You understand?"

"No. Yes. I read all about the idealists in college, too. Berkeley, Hume . . ."

"The Qui Dor people say they have the right idea. To be is to be perceived. As soon as you stop perceiving me — or anything — it no longer exists. As soon as you see me again, here I am. If you carry it to extremes, the notion can lead to solipsism, but —"

"— but," Channing finished for her, "you can thank the good Lord that Bishop Berkeley was no pagan and saved himself and the rest of us from that way of thinking. Sure, to be is to be perceived.

Maybe nothing does exist unless it's being perceived, but that's where God comes in. God is the constant conserver, he said. God is always looking at everything. So everything always exists."

"But the Targoffians are atheists, dear," Ellen pointed out with exasperating logic. "You may turn around now."

Channing turned around and glared at her.

"You see, it works. I don't know what you're getting so mad about."

"Then I'll tell you. What would happen if I went on eating meals like that for a couple of weeks."

"You'd lose weight, dear. You'd fit into that bathing suit I bought you for our third anniversary."

"I'm serious, damnit."

"You'd be awful hungry. You'd suffer from malnutrition. But the concentrates come along with the food cabinet."

"Forget about the food cabinet. You're going to get rid of it tomorrow. I want to ask you something else. Who did Fanny marry?"

"She didn't yet. She's getting married on Saturday, she said."

"My mistake," growled Channing. Ulcer potential was now following him home from the office. "Who is she going to marry?"

"Whom."

"Yes."

"Someone sent by the Qui Dor people."

"Will he be real?"

"We just went through all that."

"Will I be able to see him?"

"Yes."

"Anybody?"

"Of course. You see, he's real. Not only that, he'll be the ideal husband. At least, he'll be Fanny's ideal husband. You have a wide variety to choose from, they told me. You can even buy one whose temperament changes to suit yours day by day."

"There were fifty thousand divorces in New York so far this week," said Channing, "according to the under-secretary of Health and Public Welfare. Have you any idea why?"

"I guess people were shedding their spouses to marry the ideal mate before the price went up. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"I think so," Channing said. "I didn't think so before. I told the under-secretary not to get so upset. But I want you to answer one question. Will Fanny's husband be able to give her children?"

"No," Ellen conceded.

"You get rid of the food cabinet tomorrow."

WITHIN a week, the brick wall became a nightmare. Health and Welfare met with State on the highest level. Health stood firm; something must be done about the situation. Health's fig-

ures were not only impressive, they were downright frightening. In Buenos Aires, where Latin tempers flared and, anyway, summer was approaching, one out of every two recent marriages and one out of three of older vintage could be expected to end in the divorce courts — if annulment did not get them first. In Paris, the shrugging French found the answer in multiple marriage, provided not more than one of the partners was a bona fide human being. In Russia it became illegal to talk of Qui Dor's creations: they did not exist.

State was equally firm: the cause of the situation could not at this time be removed. Health must find its own internal solution. The Denebian Ambassador began to pass snide remarks and send home delightful tidbits of propaganda — was it true that the wife of the President of United Amerurope had visited the attorney general's brother-in-law concerning the possibility of divorce?

The Council of International Security met with the President, who had been called home from his Martian vacation. Health was adamant; State left the conference with a won point but a red face. The Denebian Ambassador received a copy of the minutes of the special session and gloated. Some said Health had maliciously given the transcript to the saurian from

Deneb. State marched into Bryan Channing's office with his red face and demanded a solution. Someone, said State, would have to resign.

"Which would solve nothing," Channing told his boss glumly.

"But we might get off the hook. What about that explorer, Nicholson?"

"He did his job," said Channing. "Just like I'm trying to do mine."

"The wolves are howling from both directions," pleaded State. "You've got to do something."

"That's the trouble. Both directions. If we get rid of Qui Dor and tell the Targoffians we no longer want to maintain diplomatic relations, Deneb howls and we lose prestige. If we leave Qui Dor alone, Health and Public Welfare raises a stink."

"Well, it's justified. Have you heard the latest?"

"About what?"

"About a state of emergency, Bryan. Places where the standard of living is high, it isn't too bad. But try telling 'em in India they have to buy and take food concentrates along with Qui Dor's stuff. They won't listen to you. They starve to death. They take Qui Dor's medication to get rid of disease and the symptoms disappear. But they're still sick and some of them die."

"Has anyone spoken to Qui Dor

about this?" Channing wanted to know.

"Health wants to, We won't let 'em. State's job, I said. They told me, then do it. How can I do it, Bryan? What can I say? The only time I ever met this Qui Dor was when he presented his credentials. You know Qui Dor. You've talked with him. He'll feel more at ease with you — or possibly that Nicholson fellow."

"Afraid you'll have to count Nick out. He's not a diplomat. All he wants is to get back into space again. You know, it isn't a bad idea. I still have my explorer's rating. I could —"

"Don't even think of it. You came up through the ranks, Channing. A man doesn't go down the same way. He goes out. I don't like this business of giving ultimatums. We're all grown men here, but . . . Channing. I want you to see Qui Dor. I want you to reason with him. Not the full treatment, you understand. Qui Dor stays. Deneb would have us spitted over an open fire, otherwise."

"Then what do you want me to do?"

"I'll leave it in your hands, but I want results. Is that clear? Whatever you do, do not offend Qui Dor. But placate the Department of Health and Public Welfare. I'm going down to India on official business, Channing. Do you have

any questions?"

"Yes. How the devil can I make both of them happy?"

"Be diplomatic," said State, and took his leave, a worried, red-faced man with an over-sized brief case and round shoulders almost but not quite hidden by an expert job of tailoring.

"Julie," Channing called over the office intercom, "get me an appointment with Qui Dor, Targoffian Embassy, for tomorrow morning or as soon as possible. And is Nick out there listening?"

"Well . . . yes."

"Tell him, pretty please, to take his spaceship somewhere and get lost."

"Aw, boss," said Nicholson over the intercom. But he was laughing.

Channing wasn't.

At least, Channing thought as he brought his copter down for an excellent landing on the asphalt airstrip around which his and a dozen other houses were situated in suburban Center Moriches, he could retain his sanity at home. It was decidedly upper middle class, this Center Moriches community, with half an acre of landscaped grounds for each house, a copter and a surface car for each family, and enough money floating around to keep everything, including the marble-walled swimming pools, in good repair.

There was something warm and secure about upper middle, anyway. The lower strata might need some of Qui Dor's goods, the highest might play with them extensively to show that it could but didn't need to, really. But upper middle was neither needy nor had the time for such conspicuous consumption. Mindful of its bootstrap beginnings, upper middle would ape what was above in such things as marble swimming pools and over-generous charity donations and hardly leave time for what Qui Dor had to offer. An occasional food cabinet and a little family squabble, Channing admitted to himself, could be tolerated. But when he remembered Ellen's thorough knowledge of Qui Dor and his Targoffian theories, it unnerved him.

The crabapple trees had shed most of their fruit on the back lawn, dotting the blue-green carpet of grass with brilliant red. The roses were out of bloom but protected next year's blossoms with thorny security. And best of all, thought Channing, breathing deep of everything, there was the chill of autumn on the air and the brittle gold of it in the fast-fading sunlight and the leaf-burning smell of it, so piquant he could almost taste it.

Ellen was not on the back lawn, not in the den, the living room, the

basement, or the kitchen. Ellen was in one of the spare bedrooms.

Ellen had a baby.

“YOU’RE minding it until one of the neighbors returns,” Channing suggested hopefully.

“Uh-uh. It’s mine.”

“Now wait a minute!”

“Shh, please.” Ellen was burping the tiny infant who, wrapped in swaddling clothes and balanced shapelessly on her shoulder, was staring at Channing out of big, solemn eyes. The lips puckered, not all at once but slowly, building up a head of steam. Burp and frightened wail issued forth at the same instant.

“What do you mean, it’s yours?” Channing demanded. But the facts were plain enough. The spare room had been converted to a nursery, all done in pink, with crib and bath-gadget and nightstand and a little pink diaper pail.

“Do you like the name Stephanie?” Ellen asked, gently placing the infant in her crib and cooing at her until the wail subsided.

Incredulously, Channing stepped across the threshold to have a closer look. Stephanie puckered and wailed again, drumming tiny legs under the swaddling clothes.

“You’re frightening her,” said Ellen.

“Will you please tell me what’s going on here?”

“Only if you lower your voice.”

“There,” Channing told his wife in a furous whisper which made Stephanie shriek. “Now tell me.”

“Dr. Lang said I couldn’t have a baby for two more years. You know that. When I heard about the babies Qui Dor Enterprises were —”

“So now it’s enterprises,” Channing shouted. Stephanie drowned him out.

“She’s pretty, isn’t she?”

Stephanie’s small, snub-nosed face was pink with fury. The mouth opened wide and hollered.

“I don’t care if she’s going to grow up and be Miss Universe. By the way, does — does she actually grow up?”

“What’s the matter with you, Bryan Channing? Of course she grows up. She’s real.”

“As real as that food cabinet. How much did she cost?”

“I won’t tell you while you’re mad like that.”

“Don’t you see how fantastic this is?” Channing pleaded, “We can’t go around with a fake baby.”

“Fake? How dare you!”

“Yes, fake. How would you go about entering her in school when she’s four years old, for instance?”

“We’ll worry about that in four years, but don’t you call Stephanie fake. Anyway, Qui Dor is selling so many babies, provisions will have to be made.”

"That's what the salesman told you. The Vienesese."

"Yes. But if you had to clean up the mess she makes, you wouldn't call her fake."

"She goes," Channing said, pointing theatrically at the door, then regretting it. How did he ever get to be a diplomat, anyway?

Ellen ignored him. "You know, dear, I think she looks like you. I was able to select my own features and weight and everything. At birth she weighed six pounds. She's two weeks old now and already gained a pound."

"At birth? Two weeks?"

"Well, you know what I mean. She would have, if she —"

"Oh, then you admit it?" said Channing in triumph. "She isn't real."

"Well, she wasn't born like — like other babies. But she's real. You may hold her if you want."

"I don't want."

"Just to convince you."

"Let's not go through that again."

"You're shouting. You're making Stephanie cry. What's the matter with you, Bryan?"

"Nothing's the matter with me. My wife is going crazy. Here I'm supposed to put a stop to this sort of thing on a worldwide level, and my own wife betrays me."

"That Vienesese had a good point, you know. I don't entirely agree with him, but he said a lot of

women like babies and want children, but would rather not go through nine months of pregnancy and giving birth and all. Qui Dor Enterprises provide the baby."

"It's not real."

"Don't call Stephanie an it, I said. She is perfectly real. She is as real as you. You can touch her, feel her, smell her — try changing her diaper sometime, Bryan." Stephanie shrieked.

"You sure can hear her," Channing admitted. He explored the little bundle experimentally with a forefinger and was gratified when she did not howl.

"See, you like her."

"I do not like her. She doesn't exist." Channing backed away.

"For a twenty-first century man with a college education, sometimes you can be the stubbornest —"

"She's not even a mess of chemicals!" stormed Channing. "It wouldn't be so bad if they made her in a test-tube or something. She just — is. You don't even know how they do it. You can't even call her an artificial baby."

"I'll say you can't," Ellen told him, picking Stephanie up and engulfing her with protective arms. "She's a real one."

"She goes," Channing. "It goes, do you hear me?"

"Stop shouting."

"Well, it does."

"Is that so?" Now Ellen was

shouting. "You better get that idea out of your head, Bryan. You can't boss me like that. Stephanie stays or . . . or I don't."

"You're acting like a child."

"Am I? I'm not joking. Why don't we talk about it later, after I fix you dinner?"

"Well talk about it now."

"I have nothing to say."

"I don't want to see her here tomorrow night."

"You're impossible. You're getting to be an . . . ogre."

"In the office too," Channing said. "But I won't stand for it at home, understand?"

"Don't make a scene in front of the child."

"I'm not making a scene. She's no child."

"We'll talk about it later."

"Then talk to Stephanie," said Channing. "I'm going out."

"Goodbye. Don't slam the door."

They were behaving irrationally, Channing realized as he went for a spin in the copter, clearing the suburban traffic lanes and heading west toward the city. He was as much to blame as Ellen, but he couldn't let this thing get the better of him at home. If only he could explain to the Targoffian Ambassador that his business enterprises were playing hob with the socio-economic set-up on Earth not to mention Channing's own marital life. The thing that hurt

almost as much as Channing's own troubles was the Denebian Ambassador. He could picture the saurian face gloating.

"GOOD morning, chief. You have an appointment with Qui Dor at the Targoffian Embassy, eleven hundred hours."

"Morning, Julie. Anything else?"

"You look tired."

He couldn't tell her he'd been sleeping in a hotel. A man gets used to suburban quiet. "One of those nights," he said.

"I'm afraid it's going to be one of those mornings, too, if you don't mind me saying so. Mrs. Delacourt is here."

"From Health and Public Welfare? Oh, no."

"Definitely yes. In your office, chief. And mad. Nick called and wants to see Qui Dor with you."

"Tell him nothing doing. Tell him I'll see him later. Sometimes I think it's all some kind of conspiracy between Nick and Qui Dor."

"You know Nick is only doing his job, chief. As an explorer with portfolio, he finds new planets and begins arranging diplomatic relations with them."

"With all the planets in the galaxy, why did he have to stumble on Targoff?"

"Ask Nick."

"Don't mind me, Julie. Just let-

ting off steam." Channing pushed through the door marked UNDER SECRETARY FOR EXTRA-SOLAR AFFAIRS. Mrs. Delacourt paced back and forth like a fat lion which had learned to walk on its hind legs and grown soft in the process, but was still dangerous.

"State's out," she said, bristling. "I had to see someone."

"What's it about this time?" Channing demanded wearily. If he kept this up, he would be out of a job in record time. Of all the Cabinet portfolios, Health and P. W. was the one you had to bend over backwards to please. The Secretary was usually a bridge-partner and friend of the First Lady. Her assistant might have been the wife of a five-star general or at least a Congressman. Delacourt — anyway the name wasn't familiar. "I'm sorry," said Channing. "Bad night. Can I help you?"

"I doubt it, Mr. Channing. As you know, litigation moves swiftly these days. Are you aware of the case of Myers versus Myers?"

"No, m'am." Before you knew it, it might be Channing versus Channing.

"You should be. When Sylvanus Myers died, he left an estate valued at three million dollars. He cut the widow off with almost nothing and left the bulk of his wealth to his — uh, child."

"I'm afraid I don't see the con-

nection."

"This child was purchased from Qui Dor. Child, indeed. Mrs. Sylvanus' attorneys brought suit, maintaining that since the Sylvanus child did not exist, he could not legally inherit the estate. Do you follow, Mr. Channing?"

And, after Channing lit his pipe and nodded: "They weighed the Myers baby. They examined him. They pointed out he had a set of unique fingerprints, like a person. They showed his retinal pattern was both distinct and unique, as well as his electro-encephalogram. Child psychologists tested him and found him normal in every way. He perspires and passes his water and — forgive me, Mr. Channing — defecates." Mrs. Delacourt took the whole thing as a personal insult, as if, in finding that the Myers child functioned normally, the doctors had somehow deflated not only the entire human race but Mrs. Delacourt as well.

Half listening and half wondering if he had presented the same ridiculous picture to Ellen the night before, Channing said, "Go on, Mrs. Delacourt."

"The Myers child had been born, created or made to exist in the State of New Jersey. The Myers child therefore was adjudged a citizen after his attorneys had invoked the Fourteenth Amendment. Do you understand what that means,

Mr. Channing?"

"I guess it means the Myers child will get his inheritance."

"It means much more than that. It set a precedent. Qui Dor creations have equal rights before the law, Mr. Channing. They can sue, they can vote, they can hold office, they can —"

"I can't see the harm in that."

"It encourages more of them. If you leave a fortune and want it spent a certain way, the Qui Dor Enterprises will create percisely the individual you want as an heir. It encourages crime, Mr. Channing. The Qui Dor Enterprises can create an individual for you to commit a crime. He'll do the job, you'll return him, he'll cease to exist —"

"And you'd be guilty as an accessory."

MRS. Delacourt shook her head. "No, you wouldn't. I have looked into the legality of the matter. That would be like admitting there were such things as pre-natal influence. The Qui Dor creation, whether child or full grown, is a citizen with all a citizen's rights, and since we don't recognize the possibility of pre-natal influence, we don't recognize the real criminal in such a case as an accessory."

"It's not the same thing."

"In the eyes of the law, I fear it is."

"But if you return a — a citizen

to Qui Dor and the citizen ceases to exist because he's no longer needed for the job — it does work that way, doesn't it, Mrs. Delacourt?"

"Yes."

"Then you'd be guilty of murder, taking the life away from the Qui Dor creation, I mean. It's complicated."

"No, it isn't. It's simple. You'd be guilty of nothing. *Esse es percipi*, Mr. Channing. No one's been murdered. There's no corpse. No one exists."

"I give up," said Channing. "Mrs. Delacourt, I can sympathize with you. For personal reasons, I can understand your problem. But right now there isn't a thing I can do about it. However, I'm going to see Qui Dor this morning and possibly something can be arranged to your mutual satisfaction."

Mrs. Delacourt had hardly heard him. "Yet *esse* should be more than *percipi*," she was mumbling. "There should be more to existing than merely being perceived. don't you think? It would all be so — so empty, so meaningless that way. They can make any legal decision they wish: I am more than something which is seen or touched or . . . or tasted. Not merely myself, Mr. Channing. The people. All the people. You. Are you only the various qualities of

sense, an image in my mind, an idea? Are you?"

"I don't know," Channing admitted.

"If you are, if we all are, it's a sinister plot against the people. Civilization is ruined. Qui Dor's creations shall surely take over. Why, before you know it, women will stop having babies. No pain, no nuisance, no chance of congenital illness."

"I know exactly what you mean," Channing declared ruefully. "I've got to see Qui Dor, though, Mrs. Delacourt."

"Call me and let me know. Oh, do call me and tell me you've sent him packing."

"Remember Deneb, m'am. I'll do my best."

A few moments later, a furious Nicholson telio'd Channing and informed him that the New York State Junior League was lobbying Congress to pass a law nullifying diplomatic relations with Targoff. That was the root of the evil, they said. The planet itself. We want nothing to do with them. We don't want our children associating with images. Channing swore in silent desperation. You couldn't argue with the Junior League. Qui Dor Enterprises was lowering the standard of living more and more every day, not maliciously, certainly, but lowering it nevertheless. Divorce, malnutrition, illness, crime, decreas-

ed birth rate, domestic squabbles

Which immediately suggested a hopeful but abortive attempt at reconciliation with Ellen. Yes, she was busy. Of course she had kept Stephanie. What was the matter with him, anyway? He could hear the girl wailing, couldn't he? She was so helpless. She had to be cared for. Where was his sense of responsibility? Well, yes, she still loved him, but not if he were going to maintain his pig-headed attitude toward their daughter. What? Yes their daughter. He heard her. Click and fadeout of the picture of his wife, bunting in one hand and a squealing infant with obvious quiddity but questionable essence in the other.

Three quarters of an hour later he stormed into Qui Dor's office on the top floor of an old office building which had been converted into the Targoffian Embassy in the days before anyone anticipated anything but a casual interchange of cultural trivia between the Targoffians and Earthmen. He cooled his heels in the reception room, fighting back an impulse to ask the too-pretty, too-courteous, too-efficient receptionist if she were real. By the time he was admitted to Qui Dor's sanctum sanctorum he presented, at least on the surface, the unruffled appearance of a diplomat on a routine state call.

“**B**RYAN Channing, is it not? You see, I have learned your language with no great difficulty.”

In Channing's job, you had to forget human standards. The office was large, with a high-vaulted ceiling where the insulating space beneath the building's roof had been exposed. There were two or three comfortable chairs which would fit Channing. There was a big sign beyond Qui Dor's massive desk, blocking the window and the view of other skyscrapers. It said QUI DOR ENTERPRISES — WE SELL ANYTHING. It faced into the room, and with it as a backdrop, Qui Dor looked like anything but an interstellar ambassador.

Qui Dor was a dozen feet tall and neither reptilian nor mammalian. He defied classification in any terrestrial system, but with the feathery covering, hard, protruding, pointed lips and round, small, jet-black eyes, looked most nearly bird-like. The thin legs added to the illusion; the three sets of thin arms dispelled it.

“I haven't seen you since that day I showed you around the city after Nicholson introduced us,” Channing began, settling himself comfortably in a chair and wishing he didn't have to stare at the sign behind Qui Dor's feathery back.

“You were a most gracious host, Mr. Channing. But now I suspect

your visit is of an entirely different nature.”

“Well, yes. Yes, it is.”

“I see that you are in danger of falling from Scylla into Charybdis, as it is said in your literature. You needn't mince words with me. You understand, I have my informants.” The black eyes twinkled merrily, the crest atop the long, narrow head stirred.

I'll bet they're from Deneb, Channing wanted to say. This was a pretty pickle, with the Denebians sitting somewhere out of sight and chuckling over the whole thing. Why couldn't Nick have been even more myopic — near-sighted enough to miss Targoff entirely?

“There is no limit to what I can give your people,” said Qui Dor. “Next week we are opening a line of jewelry, as you may know. It is cheaper than what you can get in your mines.”

South Africa, here comes disaster. “Artificial jewels?” demanded Channing.

“No, not artificial.”

“Natural?”

“No.”

“Real?”

“Decidedly. What is real, Mr. Channing?”

“Well — but suppose you tell me. You're the man who's livened interest in the British Empiricists after they'd been all but forgotten except by students of philosophy.”

"What are you, Mr. Channing? That is, what makes you real?"

"Umm, let me see. The chemicals. Yes, the chemicals of which my body is composed. And a soul, whatever that is. If there is such a thing."

"But are you really chemicals? That is, are the chemicals real?"

"I don't follow you."

"Like everything else, these chemicals have qualities. In solids, they have size, shape, weight, bulk. Similar properties in liquid and gas. On a secondary scale, they have color, taste, odor. On a tertiary one, they can do things. They react. They behave as expected from a study of the primary and secondary qualities. Now do you follow me?"

"I think so."

"I'm sorry to begin our discussion this way. I feel I know what your problem is, but I'm starting at the beginning. Do you mind?"

"Not at all." Mrs. Delacourt would be very unhappy.

"Who is Mrs. Delacourt?"

"Eh?" Channing cried. "I didn't say anything."

"Your thoughts have such qualities too, Mr. Channing."

"You mean you can read my mind?"

"I can perceive it, as you can perceive color. To continue: we of Targoff maintain that no thing in itself is real. Things only have

existence as their various qualities are perceived. When you leave this room, as far as I am concerned, you do not exist."

"A man named Hume went a step further than that," Channing told Qui Dor with a smile. "After disposing of the world in such summary fashion, he also disposed of you and me and everyone. The mind which perceived these qualities, he said, was nothing more than a collection — he used the word collocation, I think — of the qualities. So you have non-existent external things on the one hand and a non-existent mind on the other. The second nothing somehow gets images of the first nothing, and that's the sum total of the world."

"Interesting," said Qui Dor, ruffling his crest with a three-fingered hand, "but hardly practical. You see, Mr. Channing, our theories work. We can create your collocations of qualities to order. We can even give a man immortality."

"How can you do that?"

"Why, by recreating his qualities down to the last atomic detail when he dies."

"You wouldn't," said Channing.

"Not here, not yet, Someday, perhaps."

"I don't want to be blunt, but you're playing hob with the whole structure of our society."

THREE sets or arms spread out before Channing in a very human gesture. "We call it progress, don't you see?"

"But that's interfering with the internal affairs of another planet."

"Is it? We're not foisting anything on you. What we sell is exactly as claimed. There is no compulsory —"

"But how many people can resist?"

"How many *should*, Mr. Channing?"

"How do we know what you're creating is real, or premanent? I'll tell you this, sir: you're in trouble if it's all an illusion."

"My dear Mr. Channing I'm surprised at you. Your culture has created or accepted — or that strange combination of both which is the religious zeal — a First Principle, a Prime Mover, a deity culturally endowed with the ability to create. Your culture then supposes this deity did his creating once, long ago, and now is content to rest through all eternity. I say the first half of it is anthropomorphic wish-fulfillment. I say the second is a lack of cultural imagination."

"Are you calling yourself a deity?" Channing shuddered at the possibility. Along with Health and P. W. and Ellen, every church on Earth might soon be clamoring for his scalp.

"Yes and no. Why create — or

accept — the godhood if you have the power yourself? No wish-fulfillment was involved. And we never stopped creating."

"Are you trying to tell me that you . . . that you can actually, well, create things out of air?"

"Out of nothing, Mr. Channing. For we create nothing. We merely establish your Mr. Hume's collocation of qualities around any desired pattern. We do not admit the existence of the external world, so we are not bothered about creating parts of it. You understand?"

"How do you do it?"

"We do it."

"Where will you stop?"

Qui Dor made the shrugging gesture again. "I see that the problem is a domestic one for you as well. Here." He reached into a drawer of his desk and produced a diamond-studded tiara.

Channing touched it gingerly, as if the many-faceted gems might burn his fingers. "Was this there a minute ago?" he asked.

"It was there when I opened the drawer and looked for it. It is there now, when you are touching it. But put it back in the drawer, Mr. Channing."

Channing did so. Qui Dor shut the drawer.

"Now where is it?" the Targoffian Ambassador demanded.

"In the drawer."

"Indeed? How do you know?"

"Well, I — suppose I don't know."

"Open the drawer, if you please."

Channing did, and found the tiara. "See?"

"Yes, but what about when the drawer was shut? I admit, it's a difficult concept to grasp at once. You see, we of Targoff are not interested whether the tiara exists when someone is not actively perceiving it or not. It exists when existence becomes a necessary quality for it. It's a Monday, Wednesday, Friday concept, Mr. Channing. Your mind can grasp it only at times, and perhaps even then flittingly. Like the ontological proof for the existence of your God: by definition. He is an infinitely perfect Being. Since existence is one of the qualities of infinite perfection, He exists. Do I make myself clear?"

"No-o."

"Here. Take the tiara to your wife. My compliments. Things will work out for you, Mr. Channing."

"I came here to work out some compromise with you," Channing said, pocketing the tiara, then feeling foolish and placing it back on the desk, then deciding that would be quite undiplomatic and pocketing it again while Qui Dor's round eyes fairly sparkled. "Instead, I find myself being lectured on the philosophy behind the trouble. That doesn't help."

"You're confused, Mr. Channing. When I said things will work out for you, I meant it. More I cannot tell you, except to say the matter is entirely up to you. I should have said things can work out for you. I'm sorry if this sounds cryptic, but I can tell you no more. Incidentally, I'm sure your wife will like the tiara."

It did sound cryptic. Channing did not know if Qui Dor were sorry. Channing was sorry.

Maybe he'd be better off giving the tiara to Mrs. Delacourt.

WHEN Channing could make only a negative report to Mrs. Delacourt, the wheels began their spinning. Health and P. W. tendered a frosty ultimatum which he was forced to ignore because he lacked policy-making authority. Someone bent the First Lady's ear, who in turn bent the President's. When State himself returned from India with a redder face but no answers, he received a verbal whipping and almost achesonian condemnation in the press. Clearly, he needed a scapegoat.

While State was being chastized by the President, the scapegoat was home in Center Moriches, determined to rescue something from the sinking ship of life. He'd effect a reconciliation with Ellen and they could debate the ultimate disposition of little Stephanie at some

later date.

A savory aroma assailed his nostrils from the kitchen. He found Ellen there, scurrying from pot to pot, a determined look on her face, a stray lock of chestnut hair loose over one eye.

"Chicken cacciatore," he said, breathing deeply. "Hey now, we haven't had that at home in a long time."

"Too long," said Ellen, stirring the delicious contents of a large pot. "A girl can make mistakes, dear. Smell good?"

"Wonderful."

"I knew you'd listen to reason. I just knew it."

"Well, I'm a reasonable guy." What was she talking about? he wondered.

"That's why I married you. Taste?"

"No. I'll wait till it's on the table."

"Stephanie's gained another pound."

"That's — uh, fine."

"I must say, you don't seem as enthused about her as you did before."

"Before?"

"This morning."

He had been in his office all morning, taking the afternoon off to come home. "What did I say?" Funny, he did not remember calling her.

"You know what you said."

"Honest, I don't."

"Say, are you planning to renege or something?"

"Ellen, something's screwy. I don't remember calling you this morning."

"That's because you didn't, dear."

"But you said I said —"

"Are you trying to be funny?"

"No."

"You were here all morning. You weren't gone more than an hour when you came back."

"I — came back?"

"Of course."

"I did not."

"Are you trying to stand there and tell me we didn't have a long talk this morning in Stephanie's room? Are you trying to stand there and tell me we didn't decide to keep Stephanie and maybe even get her a little brother in a year or so?"

"What's got into you? I never said anything of the kind."

"Bryan Channing! If you're joking, I don't find it so funny."

"Neither do I. I'm not joking."

"I — I hate you . . ."

"One of us had better see the doctor," said Channing, placing his hands on Ellen's shoulders and bending forward to kiss the whisks of hair at the nape of her neck. "Maybe you'd like to go away to the country for a while."

"Don't you kiss me."

"What's the matter now?"

"You changed your mind. You're trying to lie your way out of it."

"I'll call Dr. Flint."

"You'll go out someplace and eat supper, you mean." Off the range came the pot of chicken cacciatore, its delightful contents landed into the garbage disposal unit.

"Ellen!"

But only a stiff back answered him, and presently even that disappeared when a sudden wail from the direction of the nursery summoned it, armed with bottle and burp-rag.

NICHOLSON met him in the waiting room of his office. "You sure went and put your foot in it," the explorer said.

"When did I do what?"

"Telling the Denebian Ambassador how Qui Dor was snafuing everything and why we couldn't do a thing about it. If they don't take away your explorer's papers too, you're always welcome on my ship, Bryan."

"I didn't even see the Denebian Ambassador."

"That's not what Julie says."

Julie looked up from her desk in exasperation. "You're still the boss, so maybe I shouldn't talk like this, but honestly chief, how could you?"

"Damn it! How could I what?"

"I almost fainted when that, that monster from Deneb walked in here. You always tell me to keep the intercom open when you have an important visitor and take everything down in shorthand. So I did. Then you walked out of your office with the Denebian Ambassador, smiling and practically holding hands — if you call what he's got a hand."

"I went home around midday. I never saw the gentleman from Deneb."

"You use the word gentleman loosely," said Nicholson. "And unadvisedly."

It was then that State stormed in, his face almost mauve. "Channing, pack your junk. You're fired."

"Now, wait a minute —"

"Miss Marshall here had the good sense to send me a transcript of your little meeting. Of all the achesonian gall . . ."

"Who, me?"

"Fired. Out. Now."

"But what am I supposed to have done?"

State pulled some papers from the inside pocket of his jacket. "Here, you rat. Try page three."

Channing took the papers and turned to the third page. He read:

CHANNING: Exactly what I was saying.

DENEBIAN AMBASSADOR: Then we ought to bide our time?

CHAN: Sure. Right now, Earth's becoming the laughing-stock of the galaxy. And later on it will be worse.

D. A.: That's only conjecture, of course.

CHAN: But it makes sense. Not tomorrow or the day after that, but, say, in a hundred years, Earth will be finished. For one thing, the birth rate will drop off tremendously. People will stop working, because Qui Dor can give them anything they want.

D. A.: Then we'll make threatening gestures.

CHAN: Right. And Qui Dor will supply Earth with armaments.

D. A.: At the last moment, the armaments will vanish. Earth, committed to war with us, will be helpless.

CHAN: It's my understanding that not *all* of Qui Dor's creations will vanish when that happens.

D. A.: That is correct.

CHAN: Are we talking about the same thing?

D. A.: I think so. Would you like some lunch, Channing?

CHAN: Yes, but first I believe we ought to take a look at —

"Hold it!" Channing cried as State took the papers from him. "Let me see the rest of it."

"You've seen enough. Hell, you were right there. I thought I ought to tell you we're going to see the Attorney General about possible

prosecution for espionage. Now get out of here."

State was still mauve when Channing left. Nick was shaking his head. Julie clucked her tongue, trying to dilute outrage with sympathy.

For Channing, it was all some senseless nightmare. First Ellen, then State, Julie and Nick. He took the slidestair down to the street and the brisk autumn air cleared the confusion from his head so that he knew, for the first time clearly, that he was out of a job and — temporarily at best — out of a wife. If Qui Dor had seen all this coming, Qui Dor had not mentioned it. But Channing suspected Qui Dor's ability to read minds depended on close range perception. Besides, Qui Dor had made it plain he would tell Channing nothing more than he had disclosed at their original interview.

Which left Channing one remaining avenue of information.

"IS the spacesuit adjusted satisfactory, sir?" The Denebian lacky said un-gramatically, his stentorian voice booming above the static of his own spacesuit radio.

"Yes," Channing told him.

The small saurian creature stood on a platform and dropped a plexiglass helmet in place over Channing's head. Air hissed in and Channing asked: "Can you hear me?"

"Most assured, sir. The radio is fine."

Denebians breathed a mixture of methane and ammonia and looked enough like pint-sized dragons to make Channing wonder if there had even been some contact between the races in the obscure pages of pre-history.

"Sarchix will see you now."

Channing was led into an airlock in what had been the old Crowell-Collier building and was now the Denebian Embassy, a hermetically sealed skyscraper in which most of the rooms and corridors reproduced the environmental conditions of the Denebian planet. Air was pumped from the little chamber; methane and ammonia took its place. When a light flashed red over a bolted door at the far end of the chamber, Channing opened it and walked through.

"Is anything wrong?" Sarchix demanded. The Denebian Ambassador was barely four feet tall, a chunky, fore-shortened dragon with diminutive arms, an out-thrust snout, legs like thick, armor-plated columns and a balancing tail which trailed and tapered behind and was, Channing knew, a potent weapon. A dragon on Chinese New Year's Day or Tyrannosaurus Rex in miniature.

"Why should something be wrong?" Channing said as the Denebian waved an almost-atro-

phied forearm at a couch. At least, the arm looked atrophied. It wasn't. Channing had seen how dexterously the Denebian lacky had fastened the spacesuit helmet.

"Well, you visit me so soon after our meeting."

It was no conspiracy. Channing breathed a sigh of relief, reclined on the couch as was the Denebian custom, and said: "I merely want to go over some of our plans." The Denebian Ambassador and the Department of State could not be working together to drive Channing insane. And Ellen did not fit into the picture at all.

Somewhere, there was a *second* Bryan Channing.

"But we hardly have any plans, Channing. All we have to do is wait. You said so yourself. Your job is only to keep us informed."

"I have some bad news, then. I was fired."

"Eh?"

"That is, Bryan Channing was fired from his job today. His secretary overheard our conversation and sent a transcript of it to the Secretary of State."

"That is too bad," Sarchix admitted. "We could use a man in your position. Tell me, Channing, are you prepared to play the Channing role completely?"

"Yes. Yes, I am."

"Then we still have a chance. Let the secret out. There is a real

Channing and an *es percipi* Channing. You have his appearance, his fingerprints, his memories. Reveal him as a traitor, a Qui Dor creation. Then you can have the game as well as the name."

"In other words—"

"In other words, two Bryan Channings are a nuisance, anyway. You would undoubtedly make a blunder sooner or later, or Channing himself will discover the fact. Beat him to the punch, find him in some awkward situation and prove your point. Of course he'll claim he's the real Channing. Naturally, he'll have Channing's memory and Channing's fingerprints, as you have. But if you can accuse him and prove your point, I daresay you'll find your job waiting for you again. Keep me abreast of all developments, Channing." Sarchix spoke English with hardly a trace of accent but with all the banal idiomatic expressions. "Say, it's a pretty good deal for you, anyway. I hear Channing's wife — your wife — is quite a looker by human standards."

"She is," said Channing, glowering. The *es percipi* Channing had been contrite with Ellen. Regarding Stephanie, he had surrendered unconditionally. The dirty so-and-so might even have explored the art of love-making with her, especially if he knew all the little secrets Channing knew — which he did —

and wanted to employ them to convince his brand new wife of his old status.

"Well, good luck to you, Channing," said the Denebian Ambassador. "By the way, you left your briefcase here after lunch."

Channing spotted a duplicate of his own briefcase on the floor near Sarchix's couch. He was about to retrieve it when a buzzer sounded and the Denebian Ambassador spoke into a microphone in the wall.

Channing could not understand the language and waited politely until the conversation had ended. He stooped for the briefcase.

"Wait a moment, if you please," Sarchix told him. "Bryan Channing has returned to get his briefcase."

"OH," said Channing in desperation. "Oh."

"I was thinking precisely the same thing. If the second Channing has returned for his briefcase, then he was the Channing who visited me before. You see, he knew about the missing briefcase. You did not."

"That's ridiculous," Channing blurted. "I know who I am."

"Who are you?"

"I'm not Bryan Channing. I'm the copy. And I can prove it."

"Yes? How?"

"By telling you what's inside the briefcase." It was a gamble. Chann-

ing knew. But in all probability, the interior as well as the exterior of the case had been duplicated.

"But he knew, Channing. He knew. Well, we shall see. By now the airlock should have been adjusted for our atmosphere. There"

The door opened. In walked Bryan Channing, face clearly visible in the plexi-glass of the helmet.

The two Channings stared at each other.

"My Lord!" cried the newcomer. "Have they made *another* copy?"

"I'm the only copy," Channing said. "You're a fake. That is, you're real."

"He's lying," said the bonafide copy. "He must be Channing himself."

"Sure," said Channing. "So I barged in here to let Sarchix know I was aware of the copy. That doesn't make sense and you know it."

"*I know who I am*," Channing. "Therefore I know you're the real thing."

"Is that so?"

"Yes."

"One moment, please," the Denebian Ambassador said. "I think we can settle this."

"How?" said Channing.

"I will call Qui Dor."

"Since I'm a perfect copy," Channing pointed out glibly, "he won't be able to tell."

"Who's a perfect copy? I'm a

perfect copy."

"True enough," said Sarchix. "He won't be able to tell by any examination. But he can will the copy out of existence, leaving the real Channing. Then he can make a new copy."

"He can do what?" the copy cried. "Nothing doing. If he wills me out of existence and makes a new one, it won't be the same thing. I won't be me. I'll cease to exist. I don't care about any new copy. I care about myself."

"You see," Channing said, "he's looking for excuses."

"It's all well and good for you to say that," the copy told Channing. "You have nothing to lose."

"Unfortunately," Sarchix explained, "you both stand to lose. The original copy will cease to be, as the Channing on my left has pointed out. But after the little experiment, Channing himself will have to be eliminated. Now, if the two of you will wait inside while I call Qui Dor?"

THEY went into another room and paced together, five steps up and five back. They glared at each other. They made threatening gestures. Channing's brain was awl with ideas, all of them bad. The copy would cease to be. Channing would be destroyed. A new copy would take both their places. This was impossible. First he had

to prove himself not himself. He had neither succeeded nor failed. Now he stood to lose, as the Denebian Ambassador had said, no matter which Channing he was.

"Hey, you," he said finally.

"Me?"

"There's no one else here."

"What do you want?"

"Let's say, hypothetically of course, that you're the copy and I'm the real Channing."

"Hypothetically," said the copy.

"Hypothetically, he says."

"Let's say Qui Dor gets here and wills you out of existence. Then Sarchix has me killed and a new Channing is made. What happens to you?"

"Nothing, thanks to you. I just don't exist any longer."

"What happens to me?"

"At least you get what's coming to you. You're killed."

"Right. If we stay here, we've both had it, and you know it."

"Umm, yes. So?"

"So let's get the hell out of here."

"But if I leave I admit I'm not the copy. I *am* the copy."

"If you stay and Qui Dor proves you are the copy, you'll be destroyed in the process. If he proves you're not, they'll kill you. Go ahead and stay."

"At least why can't you admit it to me now?"

"I don't know what you're talk-

ing about," Channing said. "I figured you were still making believe you're the copy in case Sarchix had a microphone in this room."

"So that's it."

"I guess that's it. Want to come?"

"Where do we go? This is a crazy situation. We can't work together."

"I know that. I have in mind a temporary truce, just until we can get out of here. After that, the fake Channing better get off Earth and get off fast. If they find him he'll be eliminated. But it seems to me he ought to do the real Channing a favor."

"What do you want me to do?"

"No, friend, It's what I want to do for you."

"I'm the copy!"

"Never mind," said Channing. "It seems to me the fake Channing, whichever one of us is the fake Channing, ought to visit a few people with the real Channing and straighten things out for him. Agreed?"

"Let me think about it," said the copy. It was inevitable that he would come to approximately the same conclusion. They had identical minds. But, Channing thought vaguely, if he wanted to use the copy to help him out of a couple of man-sized jams, he had to assume the copy would be quite willing and eager to use him in the same way.

He'd have to watch himself.

"All right," the copy finally said. "We'd better get out of here, Channing."

Sarchix met them at the door. A Channing on either side of him, they grasped the diminutive arms firmly and carried him back into his own office. The ponderous tail lashed out to left and right. Channings fell like tenpins. But before Sarchix could reach his microphone for help, the two Channings were up again and at him, avoiding the wild-swinging tail, circling him warily for position and never once getting in each other's way.

Denebian draperies bound the arms and legs. They let the tail thump the floor resoundingly. The stentorian voice thundered, but the hermetically sealed room was also quite sound-proof.

The two Channings chucked their spacesuits in the ante-room and took the elevator marked FOR HUMANS ONLY — DENEBIANS MUST USE SPACESUITS. On the street, people stopped to stare at the identical twins, who even dressed alike, and at their age.

"DON'T be alarmed, Ellen. Turn around."

"Go away from me, Bryan Channing. I don't want to — Bryan! Bryan! Who's Bryan?"

"I'm Bryan, of course," said the copy, advancing with a sincere

smile and adding, "How's our little Stephanie?"

"Just a minute!" Channing roared. "I'm me. He's —"

"I see it now," Ellen mumbled. "I see it. I do. One of you, one is a . . . a creation. One of Qui Dor's creations." Her face was drawn and white. "How long has this been going on?" She backed away from the second Channing, who was trying to oust the first from her arms. She backed away from both of them.

"So that's your plan," Channing said. "If only one of us could stay you figured it might as well be you."

"Stop projecting."

Full circle, thought Channing in despair. Now they both wanted to prove they were real.

"Nuts to both of you," Ellen said. "The way you've been acting lately, how do I know you're both not fake?"

They looked at each other, the two Channings. They looked at her. They smiled.

"Go ahead and laugh. Go ahead and . . . Bryan, Bryan, why did this have to happen to us?"

"That's all right now, dear," the copy said.

"You take your hands off her."

"You mind your own bushiness."

"Listen," Channing said to his wife. "Do you think I'd want you to keep that — that girl inside?"

"You said —"

"He wouldn't want you to keep Stephanie," the copy said. "He'd be jealous of any other copy or any other person, not really knowing how deep your affection is. I want to keep Stephanie, however. You decide, dear."

"I didn't want to keep her all along," Channing shouted. "At least that should prove I'm me. Maybe you don't like it, but that's me, that's the man you married."

"Listen to that, will you?" the copy said scornfully. "Not two weeks old yet, and already he's getting presumptuous."

"There!" cried Channing. "How would he know the copy's age, unless he's it?"

"From when all the complications started," the copy told him blandly.

"Leave me out of this," Ellen pleaded. "I'm all confused. I don't want both of you, I want my husband. I don't even care if he's angry about Stephanie, I just want him."

"I'm not angry —" began the copy.

"That's enough, you." Channing grabbed his arm firmly and steered him from the house. "There are other ways to settle this."

"Like what?"

"Like you'll see. First of all, we'd better get our job back. Then, I'm beginning to get an idea."

"I don't think I'd like it."

"You wouldn't."

"I'm beginning to get an idea too."

"I guess I wouldn't like that, either."

"You'd hate it."

"At least everything's frank and above board."

"For the time being."

"Even that's frank."

"Well, here's my copter."

"I'm going to poke you in the nose. It's my copter."

But two identical copters were parked side by side on the landing strip. They both had been using copter-cabs all day.

"Suppose we just use one."

"Climb in."

"Where to?"

"You said you had an idea."

"I said we'd better get our job back," Channing told his copy.

"The idea can wait."

"So can mine."

They took off, rose into the traffic lane and headed for New York. It was, Channing was the first to admit, one heck of a complicated situation.

The robot pilot settled their argument about which Channing should do the driving.

"ALL right, all right," State said, mopping his brow. "One of you is Channing and one of you isn't. We can't seem to get

at the truth right now, however. I take it you want your job back."

"Yes," said the copy.

"Yes," said Channing.

"Do I give it to both of you? Is your salary doubled?"

"Pretend there is only one," suggested the copy. "Give us one salary. We'll work out our own problem."

"I can't do that, either. One of you is a traitor."

"I've got an idea for you, chief," Channing said. "To your way of thinking, what's a pretty good definition of intelligence?"

"Intelligence? I don't see . . . well, it's an ability — yes, an ability to adjust yourself in a rational way to adverse environmental conditions. How's that?"

"That's fine," Channing smiled. "You now have the opportunity to do that, to meet the situation rationally. It will be quite a feather in your cap, chief. What are the adverse conditions? Well, first there's the Targoffian Ambassador and what he's doing. Second, there are the two Bryan Channings. Stop me if I'm wrong: the combination threatens the security of Earth — and threatens your job. That is, you've got to come up with a solution which will satisfy everyone including Health and P. W., and the President is not going to sit on his hands forever."

"I'm listening."

"Doesn't it strike you as odd that Qui Dor should bother to create a second Bryan Channing?"

"Why odd?"

"If Qui Dor were going about his business in an objective way, interested only in carrying the fruits of his own culture to Earth, why would he need a spy? And here's something you don't know: when the Denebian Ambassador was confronted with two of us, he immediately contacted Qui Dor. They know each other, chief. It proves they're working together."

State glowed. "If we can substantiate that, we'll have Sarchix just where we want him. We'd also have an excuse to break off diplomatic relations with Targoff. But can you prove it, Channing? That is, if you're Channing."

"We can try. I think my double will verify this: the Denebian Ambassador claimed Qui Dor could tell us apart by willing the copy out of existence."

State looked at the copy for confirmation.

"Yes, that's true. But I don't think I like what's on your mind."

State nodded. "All right, I'll buy that. But what did you mean when you said Qui Dor could will the copy out of existence?"

"The Targoffians maintain that the real world isn't — real. It seems to work for them, so we can let it go at that. Apparently their

creations are mental projections, akin to extra sensory perception, perhaps — although this is creation, not perception. If Qui Dor thinks a copy doesn't exist, it doesn't."

"Wait a minute," protested the copy. "They were going to will the copy out of existence, then destroy the real Channing, then create a third one."

"Not if we conduct the experiment on our own terms," Channing explained. "We'll be able to protect the real Channing. You see, whichever one of us is real has nothing to worry about."

The copy stared mute murder at Channing, then wilted almost visibly when State decided: "That sounds fair enough to me. How soon would you like us to contact Qui Dor, Channing?"

"Not for a while yet, please. I have to see a man about a little job."

"Well, I'll meet you home," said the copy.

"The hell you will. We're going to share a hotel room until all this is over. If you think I want you giving my wife ideas about that little monster . . ."

"Your wife? Monster?"

"A hotel," Channing insisted. "Get us a double room at the Waldorf Towers. I'll see you later."

Half an hour's time saw Channing in conference with Nicholson over a couple of steins of ale. "Well,

Nick," he said finally, ordering one more round, "how soon can you get started?"

"As soon as I can get a crew together. Tonight, for sure. Let me tell you this, Bryan: after the crazy stuff which has been going on around here, it will be a pleasure to get into space again."

"I'm depending on you, Nick."

"It's a cinch."

"Speed is everything, don't forget." Channing sipped the foamy head and amber liquid. "How long will it take you?"

"Three days out to Targoff in sub-space, a day on Targoff. Three to reach Deneb. A week, Bryan."

"That's a long time. Well, I I guess that's it. And Nick?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't find any more planets on the way."

Channing called State and arranged the appointment with Qui Dor exactly seven days hence, suggesting that Sarchix of Deneb also be invited. Mrs. Delacourt, too. Might as well make everyone happy.

"SO tomorrow your plan goes into effect," the copy told Channing in their hotel room.

Channing looked up from his magazine in surprise. "How did you know that?"

"I called State to verify the ap-

pointment. You realize that it can have only one outcome for me."

Channing shrugged. "I can't help that. Look, I have nothing against you. You can still get off Earth if you want to."

"What would happen to your plan then?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know. I still think it looks good."

"Thanks for offering me my life, anyway. I'm not going anywhere, though."

"Suit yourself."

"You are."

"How's that, again?"

For answer, the copy shouted, "Hey, George!"

Three big men lumbered into the room, each one large enough to give a Centaurian marsupial a good tumble. Four-foot tall George followed them. George was from Deneb, complete with spacesuit.

"I had a plan, too," the copy reminded Channing. "You forced my hand, as they say."

Channing dropped his magazine and stood up. One of the giants palmed him back into his chair.

"Sit still," said George.

"Now, see here . . ."

"Sit still. Be quiet."

"If you disappear, they'll call the experiment off. Qui Dor will say he already destroyed you. He'll apologize about copying me in the first place."

Channing's heart was thumping

in his temples. "You're going to have me murdered," he said. He wished he could come to some other conclusion.

"And have the body found when you're supposed to be non-existent? *Esse es percipi*, don't forget. A dead Channing would embarrass us as much as a live one. You'll be taken far away instead."

"And then murdered. You can't chance my coming back."

"You seem hell-bent on your own demise."

"I'm just projecting, as you once said. I should have done it sooner." They had him, Channing knew. The three men had spread out about the room, a swift, athletic strength in their every motion. The Denebian barred the door, balanced forward on heavy-thewed legs, the tail unencumbered by weight and ready to lash out.

Abruptly, Channing leaped for the telio. The largest of the three big men let him reach it, then slammed the edge of his hand down as Channing clawed for the receiver. Channing nursed a numb wrist and stared hopefully at his one remaining avenue of escape. The Denebian twitched his tail, making thumping noises on the floor.

Channing launched himself at the door, but the Denebian pivoted and brought his tail around in a rising arc. Channing met it head-

first and collapsed on the floor.

IT took some time for Channing to realize that he was in a trunk or box of some kind. The darkness was absolute. He was so stiff he wondered with a growing sense of horror if he had been embalmed. He seemed to be sitting upright, head thrust forward and down, knees drawn up. Only his arms had comparative freedom. Since there was absolute darkness all around him, he wondered how they managed to bring fresh air into his box. Unless it were dark outside, too. Unless they didn't try.

He tried to rock forward experimentally and found that he could not. His feet were wedged tightly, his back was against a wall. He could only lift his arms half overhead, at which point his groping hands encountered an unyielding surface.

The inside of the box, which could barely accommodate Channing, was hot — hot as a copter left too long in the summer sun, its windows shut. He was acutely conscious of the sweat streaming down his face, drenching his clothing, burning his eyes. His head ached and he felt weak. He needed salt. He was trembling and nauseous from lack of it.

He lifted his arms again and struck the surface above his head with his knuckles. He struck it

again. The noise sounded like sudden, angry thunder in his ears, but the blows had been feeble and he did not believe the sound carried very far. In the first few moments he rapped with his knuckles continually, until he could hardly hold his hands over his head. After that he paced the blows and sweated and thought.

Was this tomorrow? Had Nick done his job on schedule? A fat lot of good it would do if Channing remained where he was. He was in no position to make book, but the baggage compartment of a spaceship seemed a good bet. Outward bound, said spaceship, with a slowly suffocating Channing to be disposed of at someone's leisure. The second Channing was just brazen enough to pull it off. Since Channing had disappeared utterly, it would be assumed he was the copy and had gone to collect whatever reward copies collect after they no longer are wanted.

His raw knuckles brought no response, but after a time he found he could rock the box from side to side by bracing his elbows against its sides and shifting his weight first in one direction, then the other. Rocking intervals became longer as the box leaned further. first to left then to right. In what seemed a short time, Channing was exhausted. It was too warm, too wet, too stuffy. It was utterly, com-

pletely, despairingly useless. If he could have stretched out in quiet repose with a cool breeze wafting him, he might have given up at that point. Instead, he summoned all his remaining energy and channeled it in a final lunging effort.

He felt himself tumbling, over and over. His head and arms took a merciless battering which made him wish, suddenly, the box had been even smaller and more constricting.

He came to rest. A scratching noise bothered him. Damn vermin, go away. But the scratching was outside.

Light blinded him.

" . . . some kind of animal, instead of declaring it. How cheap can people be when they're willing to spend . . . it's a man!"

A face swam down at Channing, who blinked his eyes and squinted and could see.

"Are we in space yet?" he cried, struggling to get up. "Are we in space?"

"I'll say this for you, Channing," State admitted. "You never come up with the same old song and dance."

"Don't you see?" the copy asked. "My double has been eliminated by Qui Dor already. Right, Qui Dor?"

"Right. There was some misun-

derstanding about the time, and I merely willed the double out of existence."

"Well, I don't know . . ."

"I do," said Mrs. Delacourt. "This doesn't solve anything as far as I'm concerned. We still have all the same problems."

"You're so right," said Channing, entering the room on the double. "Sorry I'm late, everyone."

State stared Qui Dor down. "I thought you said —"

"I don't understand it," Qui Dor protested.

"They tried to have me killed," Channing said quite matter-of-factly, as if it weren't very important to him. "Because I was real, I couldn't be willed out of existence. This ties the whole thing up, boss. Qui Dor and the Denebian Ambassador are working together in a conspiracy to —"

"Your whole case," Qui Dor interrupted him, "rests on one simple fact. You claim we created a double for you because we wanted a spy, as you put it — an informant would be better — to keep us abreast of all diplomatic developments here. Well, I will admit it. You are the real Channing and this other man is your copy."

The copy moaned softly. Channing felt sorry for him.

"But," Qui Dor went on, "the copy was never created for that purpose, and I can prove it. Mr.

Secretary, will you summon the witness I have waiting?"

State nodded, glared at Channing, opened a door. In walked Ellen. "Darling," she murmured, running into Channing's arms. "I'm ready to admit I was wrong. I don't want Stephanie. I don't want your copy. I want you."

"You see, Channing," Qui Dor explained, "after you and Mrs. Channing began to argue about the little girl she had purchased from my representative, she decided to purchase, for a trial period, a copy of you which had all of your traits she liked, and none of the bad ones."

"You didn't," Channing said.

Ellen nodded slowly. "I — I guess I did. I was wrong."

Qui Dor offered State a forgiving smile. "You see how you Earthmen can jump to conclusions?" he asked. "What is so nefarious about the woman ordering a twin of her husband?"

"Plenty," Mrs. Delacourt snapped at him. "You're wrecking our social institutions. Of course, I wouldn't put anything past the Channings — all three of them."

"That's beside the point," The Denebian Ambassador spoke for the first time. "In all fairness to the man from Targoff, we ought to think of first things first. If you want my opinion as an objective observer —"

"That's a laugh," Channing shouted. "You know damn well you're not objective and never were."

"— I would say this man Channing is a trouble maker. I think I told you he assaulted me not long ago."

"Yes," State admitted, "you did. I do wish, Mr. Ambassador, that whatever happens here never goes beyond this office."

"I understand," Sarchix assured him.

FRUSTRATION mounted in Channing and exploded. "You're all a bunch of gullible fools!" he cried. "Letting them pull the wool over your eyes like that. The only one with any sense is Mrs. Delacourt."

State crimsoned. "That's enough, Channing. If I were your wife, I would choose the copy."

Ellen shook her head firmly.

"In that case," Qui Dor said. "we might as well eliminate the second Bryan Channing. You are quite sure, Mrs. Channing?"

"Oh, yes."

"I don't believe my wife had anything to do with it," Channing blurted. "Maybe this isn't Ellen at all. Maybe she's a copy." Prove it, he told himself wearily. Go ahead and try to prove it.

Qui Dor ignored him. "Let me tell you in advance," he said,

"that the elimination of a copy extends beyond the merely physical. When the second Channing disappears, so will your memory of him. You will remember that any individual, any object — created by me or not — is merely a collocation of qualities perceived by you, the people aware of the object. To destroy the object is to destroy the collocation of qualities within your minds — past, present, and future."

In spite of himself, Channing was interested. "But according to the British Empiricists, God's awareness was the constant conserver . . ."

"We of Targoff are atheists. We have no God-memory, no constant conserver. But why debate it *a priori*. Watch."

"Wait, please" wailed Channing's copy. It was his own voice and it was unnerving.

The copy wasn't. Not gradually, but all at once. The copy vanished.

"Well," said State, gazing about in a brief moment of confusion, "you haven't been able to prove your point, Channing. I see no evidence of collusion here. What were you trying to tell me, anyway?"

Channing shook his head. "I don't remember." It was as if he had just awakened from a dream and the more he tried to remember it, the vaguer his memory of it became.

"I suppose you know you're through, Channing."

"I — I was fired, wasn't I?"

"You were. I can't remember why, though . . . wait a minute." The Secretary had seen Mrs. Delacourt.

"Certainly," she said, dragging herself up from the same un-remembered dream. "I insisted on it."

"You'll get decent references," said State.

"Thank you."

"Mr. Ambassador — both of you — I'm terribly sorry about all this. If I can use my good offices in any manner whatever to help you, feel perfectly free to —"

"One more thing," Channing said. "One thing before I go."

"Yes?"

"In a moment." He frowned. He scratched his head. He sensed that some vital cog had been slipped from his memory and all the little pieces which remained had fallen apart chaotically. "I guess I'll go," he said slowly. "I don't remember." He edged toward the door, Ellen following him.

"I don't care who's fired," Mrs. Delacourt told anyone who would listen. "Something has got to be done about the Targoffians."

Nick was going to Targoff to do something about it, Channing thought dreamily. No, he was going to Deneb, via Targoff. Channing was supposed to call him.

"Oh, yes," he said. "I've got to make a call to Deneb."

"Deneb?" Sarchix thumped his tail.

"The Earth Embassy there. Our explorer, Nicholson." While State protested and Mrs. Delacourt went on complaining, Channing placed the call on their sub-space tie-line. If anyone could get rid of Qui Dor and his copies, it was Nick. But strangely, Channing had thought he had something concrete to go on. Well, Nick might help.

THEY spoke at length and Channing told the explorer to hold on. He turned to Sarchix. "Mr. Ambassador," he said, "I thought you'd like to know that we've done Deneb a great favor."

"What's that? What did you do?"

"We established diplomatic relations between Targoff and Deneb."

"You're joking."

"No. Honest."

"Why in the world did you do that? I mean, it would seem that we're capable of making our own decisions when it comes to —"

"Uh-uh," Channing shook his head. "You just refused to accept a good thing when you saw it. Good old Targoff and its magic. Now that relations are established, of course, if for any reason you decide to break them, that won't look

so good as far as the rest of the galaxy is concerned — unless Earth and Deneb should decide to break relations with Targoff simultaneously."

"Let me at that telio!" Sarchix cried, and was soon busy talking with Nick in English and someone else in Denebian.

"Will someone please tell me what's happening?" State demanded.

"I'm not sure," Channing said. "Somehow, Deneb discovered Targoff and hid the fact, then got us to discover it. It was a way to wreck Earth's position in the galaxy, and to weaken Earth over a long period of time to such an extent that Deneb would be top dog. But now, as the Ambassador is beginning to find out, Deneb will also be confronted with a lower standard of living, a high divorce rate, a low birth rate, food which doesn't prevent malnutrition, medicine which cures symptoms but not disease"

"I see, I see," Mrs. Delacourt beamed on Channing for the first time since they had met. "Everyone can save face if Earth and Deneb break off relations with Targoff at the same time."

"Right. Only poor Targoff gets left out in the cold."

"I assure you, it is far worse than that," said Qui Dor.

Sarchix had finished on the tie-

line and turned to face Channing with a beaten look on his face — if you could call it a face and the slight change of feature-orientation a beaten look. Channing thought you could.

"Then we both break relations with Targoff?" he said.

"No." Sarchix shook his head sadly. Qui Dor paced about the room as if he were cornered. He seemed to know it and Sarchix did, although no one else seemed to notice.

At one and the same instant, Qui Dor and Ellen disappeared. A flitting realization barely made itself felt in Channing's mind. Two of them, but with no chance to take root. This was not Ellen. This was a copy created by Qui Dor to convince them Ellen had wanted wanted something, he couldn't remember what, created. Targoff and Qui Dor had not been discovered by Sarchix of Deneb—the Denebians had created them. The original power resided in the Denebians!

White hot and searing, it entered his mind — and vanished. He watched the Denebian Ambassador shaking hands with the Secretary of State before leaving the room. Somehow, the Denebian Ambassador looked glum, as if he had lost something important.

"Am I fired or something?" Channing wanted to know.

"I seem to remember some talk about it," State said vaguely. "But it doesn't make sense. There's no reason to fire you."

"I should be angry at this young man," Mrs. Delacourt mused. "Can't remember why. Well, good day, Mr. Secretary."

She left.

"What did she want?" State asked Channing.

"Beats me."

"I'm tired, Channing. Going to take the afternoon off. You look bushed yourself. Why don't you do the same?"

"Thanks," said Channing.

"I'll keep in touch with the office and call you if you're needed."

"Much obliged," said Channing, and headed for home.

ELLEN didn't let him go into the kitchen, but he could smell the chicken cacciatore, anyway. Dinner was interrupted, however, when he received a call from State.

"This will interest your man Nicholson, Channing," the Secretary said, "although it isn't actually in our field. If he's ever in the neighborhood, he might investigate, though."

"What will interest him? Say, where is Nicholson, anyway? Seems to me I sent him someplace. Well, he'll turn up."

"Nothing much, really. It seems

a star six hundred light years galactic north of Deneb disappeared. Since it didn't have any planets, I suppose it really doesn't matter."

"I'll try to remember and tell Nick," said Channing. "Did the

star have a name or just a catalogue number?"

"They named it after the man who discovered it with the new Luna telescope. Professor Targoff. It's called Targoff's Star."

THE END

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR

★ *Theodore R. Cogswell* ★

(Concluded From Page 2)

dictated by two dates — I started my undergraduate work in 1939; I finally got my B. A. in English in 1948. Part of the out time was spent on the usual string of odd, short term, and low paying jobs that the flesh of writers seems particularly heir to, the rest was spent with the Air Force in the CBI as a statistical control officer.

I got into writing the same way that I did into teaching, by a series of happy accidents, acquiring one wife, two children, and three motorcycles along the way. Shortly after I took a job as an instructor at the University of Minnesota (an excellent institution except for one thing — there was really no place in the English curriculum for a specialist in 21st Century Lit.) I met Poul Anderson and Gordon

Dickson.

"I have a wonderful idea for a story!" I said (For years I'd been having wonderful ideas for stories. The problem, of course, was to find somebody to handle the minor chore of writing them down.) After letting me buy several more rounds they came up with a brilliant suggestion, "Go write it," they said. So I did. Somebody bought it. So I wrote another. Somebody bought that too. So I kept on. And that's how I become a pusher.

At the moment I have a pleasant job in a pleasant barely-southern university which is surrounded on three sides by horse farms and on the fourth by basketball players. Life is ideal.

—Theodore R. Cogswell

The Last Plunge

by

S. J. Sackell

Granting the need for money, a man will do any dangerous job that comes along; Borgmann was such a man; air lion diving off Uranus — the job!

WHEN you are only about ninety degrees from absolute zero, it is not hot, despite the fact that the sun is shining down on you twenty-four hours a day. The answer to this riddle is that you are on Uranus, in the arctic circle, where the sun is a bright star almost directly overhead. And what are you doing on Uranus? You need the money.

Nils Borgmann, however, was sweating. And the reason was that the heating unit on his space suit, like the heating units on almost all space suits, was not functioning properly. The breathing mechanism was in good shape, however, and the oxygenator on the raft pumped in fresh air in satisfying amounts.

Nils needed money badly, for he had a wife and seven children. So he said, "Let me down a little farther." For he saw a big, white

shape dimly through the murk—an air lion.

Up on the raft, where they heard the message, the drum went round and paid out another twenty feet of the cable by which Nils Borgmann was suspended in the Uranian atmosphere. Borgmann took aim and fired.

The shape kept moving. An air lion's hide is so tough that you have to hit it right under the ribs or through the eye in order to kill it, and Nils could not see that one clearly enough, despite the headlamp on his helmet.

"Get it?" came the voice in his earphones.

"I'll tell you when I've got one," Nils said.

"We're sending down Petrone."

"How about running the harpoon down to where I am?"

"Okay, Nils. Sorry," the voice said.



The radio was very comforting to Nils Borgmann. Through it he felt close to the surface, as if he had friends ready to help him at any moment. It made him forget the real dangers of his situation.

Nils saw the harpoon come jerking down into his reach. He grabbed

it with his left hand, then held out his right for another shot at the air lion.

"Take it easy," Petrone's voice came into his eardrums. "Don't get me with that thing."

"Can you see it? It's getting away from me."

"I think so," Petrone said. "I think it's coming my way."

"Oh," Nils said. That was one more bonus he wouldn't get. He looked around, hoping to sight another lion.

The sound of a muffled report came in over Nil's earphones. Then Petrone swore in Italian. Nils always had to laugh because Petrone would never swear in English.

And then the white shape came looming through the murkiness right at Nils's pistol. He could even see the animal's eye, whereas usually you were lucky if you could distinguish the head. He raised his gun and fired and had the satisfaction of seeing the lion flounder and thrash and finally subside, floating aimlessly in the air.

"Got it," Nils said, grinning. That was another bonus, and each time Nils got a bonus, one of his kids had enough money to get through college. He threw the harpoon and snagged the beast just behind its right foreflipper. Pulling in the harpoon cable, he made certain that the weapon was firmly embedded in the lion's flesh.

"Pull away," he said.

"We think you'd better come up, too," they said on the raft.

"Okay," Nils said. There was only one more child to earn an education for, and then he was going to quit.

He and the dead lion were pulled up through the atmosphere slowly and gently, but side by side, so that he could look closely at the beast he had killed.

EVOOLUTION had been kind to the air lion of Uranus. To the only animal inhabitant of a planet whose surface temperature is -180 degrees Centigrade, Evolution had granted the thickest fur coat of any animal known to man and a cold-blooded circulatory system. To the inhabitant of a planet whose atmosphere is mostly hydrogen and methane, Evolution had given a complicated respiratory apparatus that breathed in hydrogen and exhaled hydrogen sulfide. To retain the balance of Uranian chemistry, Evolution had provided a brittle, yellow, rootless plant-life that inhaled hydrogen sulfide and exhaled hydrogen. To the inhabitant of a planet where most of the atmosphere was in a liquid state, Evolution had seen to it that the air lion was perfectly capable of living entirely in a liquid environment: a thick skin and heavy bone structure enabled the air lion to withstand the heavy pressures of the Uranian depths, gills made it possible for him to breathe liquids, and his powerful flippers made him the strongest swimmer in the solar system.

One would say that a bountiful Providence had been good to the air lion. Granted the inconveniences of its environment, certainly the air lion was efficiently equipped by Nature to live on its home planet. But Providence also provided the air lion with a natural enemy which bade fair to exterminate the species. And that enemy was women—the same women (or rather, their descendants) who caused the extermination of the egret. Women on Earth had taken a fancy to air lion coats; and, despite the high cost of these coats (between forty and fifty thousand dollars), the number of air lions was decreasing more rapidly than any species could withstand.

To begin with, air lions were limited to the "northern" hemisphere of Uranus. Uranus is a topsy-turvy planet, tipped on its axis and rolling around the sun in the plane of its equator. The "northern" hemisphere, then, is that side of the planet which is always turned toward the sun—for which the sun is the pole star. This restriction on the area in which air lions may thrive imposed a natural limitation on the number of animals which there were in the first place. The demand for air lion pelts—despite the fact that the beasts were so

large that an entire coat might be made from one of them—caused a dangerous depletion.

NILS'S helmet broke atmosphere, and then hands were grappling him, helping him up the ladder, and pulling him aboard the "raft." The raft actually was a well constructed metal vessel; but, as it did not need a powerful engine, its motor was so weak that it hardly counted. Its gunwales rose only a few feet out of the air.

Nils, as usual, fell to the deck with a clatter. One of the space-suited men on the raft knelt down to look at him. "Hi, Borgmann," the man said. "Congratulations," His name was Kerr.

Nils smiled. Yes, it was worth congratulations. He was now only one lion—only one bonus—away from his goal, and then he could quit. And he'd be glad to quit. Dangling by a cable in liquid atmosphere is not safe work, and Borgmann was getting old for that kind of thing.

Another man squatted down and said, "Yeah, Nils. Happy birthday."

Birthday! Nils had forgotten all about it. That was right—he was thirty-five today. Realizing that he must have looked puzzled, he laughed. "It slipped my mind completely," he explained. "When

you're on another planet, Earth dates get all mixed up."

Kerr said, "The captain's ordered you aloft for a physical check-up. It came over the radio while you were down."

Nils Borgmann stopped laughing. That could mean he'd never get a chance to make another plunge, never have another crack at an air lion, never collect that seventh bonus. They'd rotate him, put him on the mother ship and fill in on the raft with a substitute.

Nils clambered to his feet, helped by Kerr and the other man, and walked over to take a look at the air lion he had just killed. It was a good, big beast, its fur still that faint yellowish color that was bleached out on Earth. It looked something like a walrus, but without any tusks.

"Just one more," Nils said, "and I'm going to quit. I've got thirty thousand dollars in bonuses, on top of my pay."

Kerr said, "That's almost enough to buy your wife an air lion coat. That'd be a nice present, so that you could be reminded of your happy days on Uranus every time she wore it."

Nils laughed and said, "Go to hell." He was feeling pretty good again. Kerr always perked him up. After all, a physical examination might be just routine; they

might find out that he could go on hunting air lions for five more years if he wanted to.

The scout came roaring over the horizon; but no one could hear it in the airlessness. Somebody saw it and said, "Here comes Erskine!" and everybody turned to watch. The scout was a gaudy red and came in low over the surface of the atmosphere. It put out its pontoons and came to a landing near the raft. Then it taxied over slowly, its jets running at their lowest speed. When it got very close it cut its motors and men in clumsy space suits grappled it and made it fast with ropes.

Erskine hopped out of the scout. You could tell who it was from the cocky stride and the colorfully decorated suit, which he spent hours in painting and shining. "Who's Nils Borgmann?" he asked. "The lucky man gets a trip upstairs for tonight. You scow jockeys will have to sleep out in the cold again."

Actually, the raftsmen lived in an air-filled bubble in the center of the raft which was comfortable and warm. But it was a standing joke that the men "upstairs," in the ship that wheeled idly in its orbit around Uranus, slept in feather beds every night with all the comforts of home except women—and some rumors even gave them that

advantage.

"Here I am," Borgmann said.

"Let's go," Erskine said. "This smell offends my nostrils. I just don't know how you guys stand it down here."

Somebody guffawed, and somebody else began singing, "Swing low, sweet chariot, comin' for to carry me home . . ."

BORGSMANN walked to Erskine's side and let the scout pilot boost him into the cabin. "So long, suckers," Erskine said as he climbed into the scout and clanged the door shut behind him. He pressed a button which cleared out the faint traces of Uranian atmosphere in the cabin and pumped in an Earth-type mixture. Then he unscrewed his helmet and grinned at Nils, who by then was struggling with his own. "I hear you got your sixth one today," he said, starting up the jets.

"That's right," Nils answered selfconsciously.

"Well, that's good. There aren't many men with six lions to their credit." He took off, and Nils could feel the scout rising, heading out into space.

Erskine was busy with his navigation, and Nils was glad that there was little time for conversation. He leaned back and closed his eyes. He was always tired af-

ter a plunge. But sleep would not come, and he roused himself and peered out of the porthole.

By this time the raft had dwindled to a speck on the vast, featureless surface, and the scout had climbed high above it. The sky was black, even though it was a region of eternal day. On the raft, far below, little sparkles of light moved in a random dance—the headlamps of the men.

But out and away the scout moved until the horizon lay between it and the raft. High and higher it went until the planet was a smooth, gray ball beneath and behind it. And then, out of the black daylight sky, a pattern of red and green lights seemed to take shape above them and ahead. It was *Proserpine*, their ship.

The scout and the ship fell toward each other at tremendous speeds: the ship loomed huge, like a great silver cigar, then like a curved wall, then like a metal hand someone was holding up just outside the portholes so that you could not see out. It seemed to Nils that it was inevitable that they crash. Erskine flipped the ship over, but there was no discomfort because neither he nor Nils had any weight to be displaced. And then Nils saw him flip the toggle that turned on the scout's magnetic grapple. There was a scrape and

a jarring bump that sent Nils floating out into weightlessness. And the scout had arrived home.

The scout was swung into the ship by powerful motors, and after the ringing of the bell which signified that the scout's berth was filled with air, the two men emerged from the small craft and went into the ship. Captain Davis was there to greet them. "Good trip," he told Erskine. "Borgmann, I'll bet you're happy to get aboard ship again." He shook hands vigorously. "We have a good hot dinner waiting for you, and then a bath and a soft bed. You'll see Dr. Carpenter in the morning."

And, after months on the raft, life on board *Proserpine* was a luxury. The food was good; even though it, like that on the raft, came from cans, it was prepared with more artistry. There were no facilities for bathing on the raft, and the streaming water of the shower and rich suds of the soap was a real sensuous delight. And the beds—well, the bunks on the raft were good, but there was something about the beds on the ship that were so eminently sleepable that Nils dropped off immediately, not even thinking about the physical examination.

IT was the first thing he thought of, however, when he woke up

in the morning. And he was worried. It seemed, today, very real and inescapable; last night the idea had been so new that he had not really been fully aware of what it might mean.

And immediately after breakfast he was subjected to it. The doctor was thorough; Nils had to give him credit for that. And at the end, he said, "Well, Borgmann, it looks like a vacation for you."

Nils had been dreading those words so much that they were really not much of a surprise to him. But still there was a dejection that he could not overcome. He said, "What are the chances of my getting one more lion before I have to quit?"

The doctor was surprised. "Generally the men are glad enough to get off Uranus. We'll have enough trouble getting one of *Proserpine's* crewmen to go down there and take your place."

"I know," Nils said, "but with me it's different. I want one more chance at a lion."

"Well," the doctor said, "you'll have to take that up with Captain Davis. But, my recommendation is that you stay up here on *Proserpine* until we go home."

And so Nils took up the matter with Captain Davis. The captain was also surprised. "I can't understand it, Nils. You have thirty

thousand dollars in bonuses already, on top of your salary of six thousand for the year. Why do you want to go down again and take all those chances?"

Nils was not a man for making speeches, but he did his best to explain to the Captain that he had seven children, and it took one air lion to get each of them a college education. He had one child unprovided for, little Siegfried, and he didn't want to quit until he had taken care of them all.

"Well, that's very commendable, Nils, and I can appreciate your point. But why are you so certain that it will take exactly five thousand dollars to get each one through college? There are state universities, you know, and they aren't very expensive. And if they ran short, they could make their own way for part of the time, you know. Why don't you just divide the money you have now among the seven kids?"

"I can see I'm not explaining this so good," Nils said. But they're my kids, Captain, and I want to do it right for each of them in my own way." The image of Eric—the oldest and his favorite—came into his mind, and his eyes grew warm and moist.

"Yes, I understand that, Nils, but—"

"No, Sir, you don't understand.

I have a dream, and I'm just about to have it come true. You can't make me stop short now and change the dream." He wanted to go on, but the words would not come to him.

"Well," Captain Davis said, more seriously now, "maybe you are right." He nodded, soberly. "Nils, you've been on Uranus about six Earth months, now. The doctor says you shouldn't take even one more plunge. It's hard work, and it's a strain, and you're wearing out. You're wearing out gradually—but still faster, much faster, than a man would on Earth, no matter what he did. But this isn't something that just happened yesterday, Nils; it's been going on since you got here. You were lucky we let you sign on, close as you were to the age limit. Who can say when you finally crossed the danger line? Maybe a month, maybe two months ago. You've been on borrowed time since then, whenever it was. You shouldn't have taken that plunge yesterday, or perhaps the last fifty plunges. Do you realize that?"

"I guess so."

"And we're doing you a favor. Instead of gambling with your life, you can knock off now, take your thirty thousand dollars, and call yourself the winner."

"Captain, I don't care what you

say. It's my dream, and I want to get that seventh lion."

"Nils, you're a stubborn cuss. All right. But the minute you get that lion on your harpoon, we're hauling you up."

Nils grinned happily. "That's a deal," he said.

And so Erskine took Nils back down to the raft.

ON Uranus there is no sense trying to make a man adapt to any of the natural divisions of time there, such as the rotation of the moons or the position of the sun; and as long as man is attuned to the artificial twenty-four hour day anyway, that is the most convenient unit of time. You have sixteen hours to yourself, for whatever you want to do — sleeping, reading, playing the visitapes, or anything else that strikes your fancy in the limited space of the air bubble, half of which is always dark and the other half always light.

But the other eight hours belong to the company. For six of them you man the pumps or the radio equipment or the cable drum while the other men plunge, and you make your plunges in the other two.

When Nils went on duty that day, he was on the radio, and Kerr was down below. The optimism he had felt after his talk with the

captain was dissipated. He realized that, after all, the air lions were a disappearing species. He had been here hunting them for six months and had bagged only six. One a month—yet that was the best record of any of the men. And here he was, expecting to get his seventh in the next day or so.

Kerr was calling for more cable. Nils reassured him absently and signaled the crew at the drum.

The hunter said, "What's the matter, Nils? You don't sound happy."

Nils said into the microphone, "Don't worry about me. You watch out for those lions."

He glanced at his watch. He had been on duty now only twenty minutes. An hour and forty minutes to go before his plunge. Usually you took it first, in order to be in your best condition, rested and untired. But, because Nils had got out of order owing to his trip upstairs, he had to take his plunge after he had already been on duty for two hours.

That was bad. He would be just a little tired. He wouldn't be quite in the right condition. His responses would be just a shade off. The work would be just that much more dangerous.

And then he thought, What if I don't get back? What if it's my last plunge? What if I don't get

that air lion? What if I die down there, Siegfried unprovided for?

Kerr's voice sounded: "I think I see one."

"Need anything?" Nils asked.

"Not so far. But I think there's something moving down there."

"Good luck," Nils said. But his voice was empty. He was thinking of himself. There were so many things that might happen to him down there, and he had only now begun to think of them.

AN air lion was a big creature. If one charged you, it could rip you right away from any one or all three of the vital strands that connected you with the surface—cable, air hose, or radio wire. Actually, the loss of the radio wire was nothing. When there was a total deadness in his earphones, the radioman signaled frantically and the diver was hauled up. But loss of either of the other two was fatal. If your air hose was cut, you died right away, not of lack of oxygen but of the liquid methane and ammonium that got into your breathing apparatus. If your cable was torn loose, there was a faint chance. You hung on, if you could, until the old cable could be taken off the drum and a new one put on. Then they sent it down and the other diver snapped it to your suit. But the air hose alone might not be capable of sustaining the

heavy suit—and if it gave way before the new cable was attached, you were dead.

"There's one!" Kerr's voice was excited in his earphones. "I can see him now. If he gets a little closer, I can get a shot at him."

"We'll send down Newcomb," Nils said. He stood up and waved to the installation, where Newcomb was sitting placidly, already hooked up to cable, hose, and wire. Immediately Newcomb rose and clambered over the side, down the ladder.

Nils glanced at his watch again. Well, only an hour and ten minutes to go.

If an air lion didn't get you, there was the chance that your cable would wear loose or that your air hose would get snarled. The air hose, after all, was rubberoid and came down loose, not taut. You could get a kink in it very easily and not be aware of it until that sudden drowsiness that was oxygen starvation hit you. Then, if you could stay conscious long enough, you could gasp it into the microphone: "My air line's fouled!" And if they could get you to the surface fast enough, or even just get the kink high enough to straighten it out, then you were saved. If it took too long, you were gone.

Kerr said, "Missed him, damn it."

"Do you see him, Newcomb?" Nils asked.

"Not yet," came the cheerful reply.

"He's a big one," Kerr said.

Forty-five minutes to go. Well, at least there was a big air lion down there, if he hadn't been frightened off by Kerr's shot, and maybe he would still be down there when Nils made his plunge. So there was a chance, not a big one but a chance all the same, that Nils could pick up his seventh lion today.

But even if the lion was down there, it wasn't at all positive that Nils would get him. That went without saying. After all, when you went down every weekday for six months and got only six lions, then it was pretty obvious that you couldn't always bag one when you wanted it. There were—how many now? — twenty-four men on the raft, and so far they'd got only forty pelts. About one every four days. Sometimes weeks went by without a catch.

"I think I see him now," said Newcomb. "He is a big fellow. I don't think I've ever seen a bigger one."

"Can you get a shot at him?" Nils asked.

"I'll try," Newcomb said. "He's coming straight for me. Lord, what a monster. I think I—No, damn

it, I missed. Here, let me—Damn it! He's—" And then came that peculiar deadness in Nils's eardrums that meant the radio wire had been severed. Nils jumped to his feet and waved wildly to the crew at the drums. They began frantically to pull Newcomb up. Soon he broke surface and was helped up the ladder. He stood, bewildered, until one of the men led him into the bubble.

"His radio wire snapped," Nils explained to Kerr.

They wouldn't send Newcomb down again today—not after a narrow shave like that. His nerve would be gone.

Nils stood up. "I'm going down after that baby," he told the crewmen. He began to work his way out of the complicated radio equipment, which snapped on over his helmet to take advantage of the built-in radio in his suit. "Petrone, you take the radio."

PETRONE came lumbering over and accepted the rig. Nils sat on the ready bench and let the other crewmen adjust the equipment he needed. The rope hooked into the back of his suit; the air hose was connected to the suit oxygenator, which was strong enough to support a man in airlessness but could not stand the pressure of the Uranian atmosphere and thus needed assistance from

the powerful pump on the raft; and the radio wire attached to his light helmet rig.

And then he was going over the side. He went down—way, way down—and then he saw Kerr.

"How is it?" Nils asked.

Kerr gestured. "He's off that way. He took a swipe at me, and I tried to get a shot at him. I think I took his ear off, but that's all. Anyway, he lit out like a jet. I expect he'll be back, though; probably he's too mad to think straight."

They watched. While they watched, the harpoon was lowered to them. Minutes passed, dragging by with interminable slowness while their eyes searched the murky depths, the headlamps making strange patterns, looking for the air lion.

And then Nils spotted him—too late. "Look out behind you!" he shouted desperately.

But he was too late. The air lion's powerful flippers forced him through the atmosphere with astonishing speed, and he struck Kerr with tremendous force and impact before the other diver could even turn around.

"God!" Nils muttered into his mouthpiece, horrified, as the lines snapped with the lion's onslaught and Kerr began to hurtle down toward the bottom of the sea of at-

mosphere, down to where the Uranian air was frozen solid.

"Did it get him?" Petrone's voice sounded in the earphones.

"Cut him off like a knife," Nils said.

"We're going to pull you up. That baby's too rough to handle."

"I'm staying down," Nils said. And the tone of his voice showed that he meant it.

"Well, we'll send Newcomb down again," Petrone said.

"Let him get his rest," Nils said. "I just got here."

The lion, meanwhile, had seen Nils with his weak eyes and was coming toward him. Nils held up his pistol and took steady aim. He waited until he could quite easily see that the lion did, in fact, lack an ear. And then he pulled the trigger.

Nothing happened.

This occasionally occurred. The pistols were very intricate mechanisms, designed so that none of the liquid atmosphere could get into them at the same time that the bullet got out. And like all intricate mechanisms, occasionally they went wrong.

The air lion was coming closer, hurtling through the liquid air now with strong beats of his powerful flippers.

Nils pulled the trigger again. And again nothing happened. He

could feel the sweat running down his face.

The lion was looming larger now; it was almost upon him. Nils could see the creature's ugly, yellow eyes.

He pulled the trigger a third time. One of the eyes suddenly disappeared, to be replaced by a hole, from which a yellow fluid poured.

But the impact of the bullet had not stopped the momentum of the lion. The body fell into Nils with a sudden jerk.

Nils dropped suddenly, then stopped with a wrenching snap.

"What's the matter?" Petrone said in his earphones.

Nils assessed the damage.

"I've broken my cable," he said. "I've still got the air hose and radio wire."

Petrone swore softly in Italian.

Nils changed the subject. "Get the harpoon about four feet lower, quick. I don't want to lose this baby."

The harpoon came down within his grasp, and he impaled the dead air lion on it.

"Okay," Nils said "haul him up."

THE pale shape of the lion began to rise above him. The idea came to him of attempting to grab hold of the lion so as to be pulled up with it. One of the men in his predicament had tried

that once; the harpoon cable had broken and both man and lion had been lost. No, there was nothing to do but wait—and pray.

Nils dangled there, in the atmosphere, like a marionette on a single string. Well, he thought, this may be the end. He tried to puzzle out why he wasn't frightened. Was it because he was still full of triumph from getting that seventh lion? Perhaps. But more likely it was because there was still a chance that he could be saved, and a man never gives up hope until he thinks that there isn't a chance any more.

"Hold on, Nils," Petrone's voice said. "Everything's coming all right. We have to put a new cable on Kerr's drum, too, you know. But we'll have 'em both ready at about the same time, so that won't slow us down."

"I think I'll drop my gun," Nils said. "It doesn't weigh very much, but it may make a difference."

"And lose the company five hundred smackers?" Petrone asked. "Okay it's your salary they'll dock. I'd rather let the air lions get me."

Nils chuckled. He worked the gun loose from his gauntleted hand—rather an awkward process, for the guns were designed to be held securely by heavy gloves. Then he released it and watched it plunge down.

Down.

Would he be following it? Would his last plunge end that way?

For the first time he began to feel a twinge of fear. The sweat started out on his forehead, and he could feel it under his arms.

He loved his wife and every one of those seven kids. He wished he could see just one of those kids again. Especially Eric. His memory showed him Eric's grinning face, and he bit back a sob.

But to die out here, millions of miles — hundreds of millions of miles!—away from them, so that they wouldn't even know it for months: that was too much.

"We're ready to start," Petrone said. "I'm coming down myself to get you."

Nils didn't answer. He was thinking. How long have I been here already? How much longer can I hold out?

"Nils?"

"I'm okay," he managed to mutter.

What would it be like? How fast would you go? And what would you see, down there on the bottom of the liquid layer of the Uranian atmosphere? There would probably be more of those funny brittle yellow plants that sometimes floated even this high; but no man had ever explored the floor of the liquid air. Would it be smooth, like

a ball?

Kerr would be down there to keep him company.

Damn it, he'd liked Kerr.

Was it his imagination, or was he really starting to slip? The trouble was that there wasn't anything he could use to measure by, no fixed point to tell whether he was already going down or not.

But once the air line broke, he'd be dead like that. He'd never see the bottom even when he got there.

Hundreds of millions of miles! "Eric!"

Petrone's voice said, "What?"

But Nils ignored him.

What would it be like to die like that? Would he even know it? Or would he strangle and gasp and shriek? He was sweating heavily now.

Just once, O Lord, just once more. Just to see them.

Well, this was his last plunge, either way. He was going to quit as soon as he had his seventh lion: he had it now, and he was through. One way or another.

"Gotcha!"

It was Petrone's voice. Nils couldn't hear the new cable click into place in his back; but he felt it.

And then he felt the slow and steady pull as he was drawn up out of the depths.

THE END

Deadline Sunday

by

Daniel F. Galouye

When children calmly announced they were leaving home, their parents smiled tolerantly. It was amusing; afterall, where could they go?

BABY JEAN rolled over on the rug, tossing the teddy bear into the air. With a strained grunt from its squawky voice box, it fell back on her chest.

"Will you miss me, Daddy?"

I looked up sharply from the paper. "Mind that lamp. You almost hit it."

She grasped the fuzzy animal and sat up pouting. "Will you miss Wally and me, huh?"

Ellen put down her sewing. "What on earth is she talking about?"

I shrugged helplessly and returned to the paper, skimming over headlines that told of the administration's new economic program; Russia's new demands; unidentified objects sighted over eight countries.

But Baby Jean was at my knee. "What will you do, Daddy?"

"What will I do about what?" I

folded the paper and dropped it into the magazine rack.

Amused at my facetious annoyance, Ellen looked over smiling.

Wally came in from the hall, nibbling on an apple he had saved from supper.

Baby Jean propped her elbows on the arm of my chair and bracketed her face with her hands. Serious brown eyes looked up under a roll of bangs.

"What will you do after Wally and I leave? Will you and Mommy be lonesome?"

Scowling, Wally came over and caught her arm. "It's a secret! You're not supposed to tell!"

Ellen leaned forward interestedly. "What is it she isn't supposed to tell, Wally?"

"Nothing, Momma." He took his sister by the hand and led her back to the center of the rug where a jigsaw puzzle of a clown's face was



half assembled. "Finish your picture Baby Jean."

She stomped her foot indignantly. "But I'm not a baby! I'm *six years old*! In two years I'll be as old as you."

She had been waging a campaign to discourage use of the nickname. But habit was persistent.

"Don't you have any homework, Wally?" Ellen asked.

"Teacher never gives us anything on Tuesdays. But she said she'd have a prize for the one who could tell her about the children's . . ." His face twisted in forgetfulness. "About the cru. . ."

"Crusade?" Ellen supplied.

"That's it."

I glanced over at my wife. "I didn't think Middle Ages history came along until high school."

"Miss Miller's a progressive. She believes in kindling interest ahead of time. You'd better tell him something about the Crusades dear, so he can win a prize."

"The Crusades . . . Well, let's see—"

"The books, dear," Ellen coaxed complacently. "You told the salesman we'd find a *thousand* uses for them."

The red leather of the thirty encyclopedic volumes, in their mahogany stand, shone persuasively.

"And so," I said, closing Volume Eight a half-hour later, "it seems that the fifty thousand French and German children never reached the Holy Land and many of them were captured along the way and sold as slaves."

Wally sat silently reflecting on the story.

"Children sold as slaves?" Ellen asked dubiously.

"And why not? They'd make the best. They might be unproductive at first. But it would take a while for them to learn the language and customs. And as children, they'd be harmless during the first few years of captivity—harmless, gullible and tractable."

Ellen shook her head solicitously and rose. "Time for bed, children."

Baby Jean scampered behind the sofa. "I don't wanna go to bed!"

"A little longer, Momma!" Wally pleaded, retreating to a corner.

"Let me stay up a little longer!"

Reconnoitering, Ellen outflanked him, seizing his wrist. In another lightning thrust, she managed to engage the secondary force by catching Baby Jean's ankle.

Holding desperately to the struggling pair, she sighed impatiently. "Parent's Crusade," she said, smiling wearily.

Baby Jean cried in protest.

Wally writhed under the persistent grip. "We won't *have to go* to bed after Sunday! You won't be able to tell us what to do. You'll see!"

WEDNESDAY WAS one of those brain-bruising days at the office, with specifications to be drawn up for three new contracts. Consequently, I dragged myself home listlessly, only to be met at the door by Ellen.

"Frank, you'll have to talk with Wally," she said, frowning. "I've already sent him to bed."

"Jumping through the Morrison's hedge again?"

"No. He came home with this note from Miss Miller:

"Wallace," she read from a slip of paper, "was unmanageable today and showed a provocative disrespect for authority. His attitude may be no more rebellious than that of the other pupils, but unless we deal with each one individually we may soon find ourself-

ves with an uncontrollable student body."

Miss Miller purposely wrote above the heads of the children so the notes would reach their destinations undeciphered.

"She makes it sound like she's got an armed revolt brewing," I grumbled.

Wally was in bed, staring morosely at the ceiling. He was oblivious to the record player on the night table that repeated endlessly a scratchy phrase from "The Good Ship Lollipop." I turned it off.

"What happened in school, son?"

He turned his head away on the pillow.

"Look," I said smiling, "this is your pop. We're going hunting together this winter. Remember? Now let's get this matter about school straightened out."

"Not going hunting."

"Why? You always wanted to."

"Not gonna be here."

"Oh?" I exclaimed tentatively. Then I remembered his vague threat about Sunday.

"Momma spanked me and put me to bed," he accused. "And now you're gonna spank me too."

He sat up, gripping the sheet. I couldn't decide whether there was resentment or defiance in his reddened eyes.

"You only get spanked when you need it."

"Well, you can spank me all you

want between now and Sunday. See if I care! But you won't spank me after Sunday—because I'm not gonna be here . . . There!"

I decided the glint in his eyes was defiance after all—of the first order. He got his second spanking.

When I went downstairs, Baby Jean was dunning her mother for a nickel.

"It's too close to supper for candy," Ellen refused adamantly.

"Please, Mommy. I'll eat *all* my supper. I promise."

"Absolutely not."

"Well you can keep your old nickel!" She stomped angrily back into the hall. "Soon I'll have all the candy I want—and ice cream too! And cake!"

"After Sunday?" Ellen taunted.

Baby Jean stopped on the threshold momentarily. "How did you know?"

WHEN SHE had gone, I put my arms around Ellen's waist and glanced over her shoulder, staring down with her into the various pots on the range. "What's all this about Sunday?"

"Some silly game they're playing, I guess."

"The kids never threatened to run away before."

"They all reach that stage eventually."

"Why Sunday?"

She laughed. "It's as good a day

as any—with church falling right in the middle of their morning.”

After we had supper, I retired tactfully to the parlor and television so Ellen could smuggle a plate and a glass of milk up to Wally without my noticing.

The telephone rang in the final round of the boxing match and, by the time the decision was announced, Ellen was poised fretfully in the doorway.

“That was Mrs. Watkins. She was trying to find out what sort of mystery the kids are cooking up for Sunday.”

“Oh? So they have little Arthur in on it too?”

“She says Arthur won’t tell her. But it’s some kind of a threat he’s holding over her head. He won’t tell because he’s sure Wally wouldn’t tell you. And Jimmy and Frank and Mary Ann and the Collins twins,” she counted them off on her fingers, “won’t tell their fathers either.”

I laughed. “Bigger than we thought, eh? A sort of mass migration, do you suppose?”

“Whatever it is, Frank,” she said seriously, “it’s something the chil—seem to be sold on.”

“If you let every little thing worry you,” I scolded jokingly, “what are you going to do after we have our next five?”

I ducked instinctively. At that point, a cushion from the sofa

should have come flying at my head. But it didn’t. Instead, Ellen was staring soberly at the television, where a series of still photographs of youngsters was parading across the screen.

“. . . and in Baltimore,” the announcer was saying, “five children were reported missing, presumably runaways. The count in Cincinnati was up to four at the last tabulation.”

He was treating the matter lightly, his words edged with laughter. “Most prominent among the four was Alexander Belling III.” The picture of an impish, freckle-spattered child of about nine flashed on the screen. “He was reported missing last night after he had threatened to ‘go away forever’ Sunday.”

Ellen stared grimly at me. “Frank—”

I laughed reassuringly. “Psychology. These things come in waves. Mass reaction. A kid runs away and gets his picture in the paper. Other kids get the idea of running away. They get their pictures in the paper. Sort of a chain reaction.”

“But—Sunday . . . And the Watkins child and the Collins twins.”

I looked uncertainly at her. “Coincidence,” I said weakly.

Together we left the room as the announcer launched into a tri-

vial conjecture on the epidemic of unidentified objects. In the children's room, Wally and Baby Jean were sleeping soundly.

"The Good Ship Lollipop" had docked for the night, with the record player's needle weaving harshly along the inside track.

"Don't waken them," Ellen pleaded hesitantly. She went over and tucked the covers in under their chins.

Baby Jean smiled in her sleep.

"Sunday," she mumbled. "Happy landing on a choc'let bar."

THURSDAY CAME with an aura of portent. Even at breakfast, while the children still slept, I could somehow sense lurking crisis, like an electrical undercurrent in the air. I had experienced the sensation before—on a quiet Sunday afternoon. An hour later there had been the pandemonium of Pearl Harbor.

Ellen sensed it too. Her youthful face was lined with the evidence. But we said nothing, for there was nothing we could put into words.

At the office, I brought the contracts in for Andy to okay. But he brushed them aside.

"What's with the kids, Frank?"

"Yours too?" I asked, not really surprised.

He nodded glumly. "Damned if I can figure it out."

"They're—going somewhere?"

"Sunday."

"Where?" I wondered why I hadn't attached importance to the destination before.

"That's what has me worried. In fourteen years Freddy has never held anything back from me. Last night I pleaded with him. I tried bribery. I spanked him—almost mercilessly. But he's being loyal to something."

Until then I had to shut out the issue, refusing to recognize it as anything serious. Now realization was taking up the slack and something more than apprehension was mushrooming.

"Has he—run away?" I asked.

"No, but he probably will."

I grabbed the phone and called Ellen. "Go get the kids from school, honey."

"What's wrong?"

"I don't know. But we're going to find out. I'll be there in twenty minutes." I cut off further questioning by hanging up.

Andy was staring out the window. "Afraid they'll run away?"

"I don't think they will. I think I can find out what this is all about."

"You haven't been listening to any newscasts. I can see that. Everybody's trying to get the kids to talk—from Washington on down."

But it *can't* be anything more

than some kind of juvenile emotionalism—grapevine hysteria, or something."

"Can't it? With children suddenly acting the same way all over the country? Irrational mass reaction spreads from point to point. It doesn't just erupt everywhere at once."

"You mean you actually believe the kids are—going somewhere Sunday?"

He shrugged helplessly. "That's what Washington's trying to find out. And London and Paris, too, it seems. They're calling it the Junior Effect."

I turned for the door.

"And, Frank—don't get excited if your kids run away. That part of the Junior Effect seems to be a temporary reaction. Most of the missing ones are turning up again."

I stared confounded at him. "Then why are they running away?"

"They," he flicked a thumb in the direction of the cabinet radio, "seem to think it's an expression of restlessness. The kids have to do *something* while they're waiting for Sunday."

ON THE WAY home, I had the cab driver pass by school hoping I could intercept Ellen and the children. I wasn't the only father with that idea. There was a parade of cabs circling the building. I

recognized some of the passengers as members of the Dads' Club.

A stream of distraught mothers hurried in one entrance and marched solemnly out another, rigidly holding their children's wrists. And abruptly I realized I was witnessing a spontaneous reaction that must be occurring at thousands of schools everywhere.

At home, the children sat sullenly on the sofa while Ellen crouched before the television. Baby Jean played with the trailers of the bow on her dress. Wally glumly surveyed his hands.

I stood hesitantly in the doorway and Ellen rushed across the room to meet me. "You've heard?"

"About the Junior Effect?" I nodded.

Then she was in my arms trembling, while we both started fearfully at the children. A learned looking man was gesturing on the television screen, trying to explain the Effect in terms of inhibited behavior.

"All right, Wally," I said sternly, drawing up a chair in front of him. "It's time we got down to some man-to-man talking."

He shrank indifferently into the softness of the sofa.

"He won't tell," Ellen said despairingly. "I tried to get it out of him."

I motioned her away. "Wally—?"

He looked out the window.

"Baby Jean—?"

"I'm *not* a baby!"

Smiling, I mussed her hair. "Of course you're not. You're a big girl. And big girls know how to talk with their daddies, don't they?"

Wally leaned toward her. "Don't listen to him. He's trying to trick you! He's trying to make you tell!"

She folded her arms and sat arrogantly rigid, her lips clamped tightly together.

"Now, Wally," I said tolerantly, "am I in the habit of tricking you?"

He stared fiercely at me, his eyes reflecting an emotion I hadn't seen in them before "Yes!" he shouted. "What about Santa Claus. You—"

Ellen stiffened; glanced pertinently at Baby Jean. "Wally!" she cautioned.

But he insolently ignored the plea. "No, Baby Jean. There isn't any Santa! Daddy's been lying to you all along!"

Her eyes opened in disbelief as she turned to me. "It isn't true, is it, Daddy? There is too a Santa, isn't there?"

"Go ahead," Wally coaxed bitterly. "Lie to her like you lied to me. And when she's eight you'll tell her the truth too!"

Baby Jean was on her feet, tugging urgently at my sleeve. "There is a Santa, isn't there, Daddy?"

I looked away guiltily—so much to say, and all under the pressure of accusation. I grasped her trembling shoulders.

"Look, Baby Jean. You see, it's like this—"

But she backed away. "There *isn't* any Santa! There isn't! You and Mommy were lying all the time!"

Ellen reached consolingly for her. But, sobbing, the child raced from the room.

I turned angrily on Wally. "That was a mean and sneaky—"

"But it's true! It's just like they say. You're cruel and mean and you lie and cheat and punish us!"

I grabbed his arm firmly. "Who are *they*?" I demanded.

But he went on with his childish indictment. "All the time it was nothing but lies. Christmas and the Easter Bunny and the rat that puts nickels under our pillow. And the devil that'll get us and the Guardian Angel and—"

"But, Wally—" He'd put me on the defensive again.

"Lies! Lies! Lies!"

I pulled him to his feet; went down on a knee in front of him. "Who's telling you all these things? Who are *they*?"

Wally wasn't the type to be bitterly distrustful all of a sudden. I was determined to find out why he was that way now.

"Wally, who's doing all these things to you? Answer me!" I shook him roughly.

"Go ahead and spank me!" he challenged. "They said you'd spank me between now and Sunday, but that I'd have to be brave."

Defeated, I released him. "Go up to your room!"

Crying, Ellen came over and pressed her face against my chest. "Oh, Frank! This isn't really happening, is it?"

Then she broke free while I stood staring numbly after her. I listened to the sound of her frantic footsteps on the stairs as she raced after the children, shouting, "Wally! Baby Jean!"

ELLEN SPENT most of the rest of that day in the children's room, trying to reason with them. I walked aimlessly through the neighborhood, trying to view the Junior Effect from a saner perspective, and wandered upon a mass meeting that materialized spontaneously out of desperation. Ironically, the afternoon gathering was at an area playground.

A slim, balding man whose children were doubtlessly already adults, climbed upon the roof of a shelter. He suggested in derisive tones that all kids under sixteen be forced to assemble in public. There they would witness the punishment of others who refused

to renounce their Sunday plans.

Another wanted all teachers investigated. Wasn't it clear that the whole thing was a Communist attack? Hadn't there been a school teacher somewhere in Missouri who was convicted as a Red last year?

Soon it was apparent no one had anything constructive to offer and the meeting deteriorated into smaller discussion groups. I listened to several fathers berating themselves on having inflicted punishment which they now realized had been spiteful rather than corrective.

Finally somebody with a portable radio climbed atop the shelter. He shouted for attention and turned up the volume.

"... so for the well-being of the country and in view of other developments," it was the grave voice of the President, "I am proclaiming a state of national emergency. And I am assuming all the powers which may be required to meet this threat to our collective security as a nation . . . to our individual identity as members of families of that nation."

I pressed in with the others until the raucous tones of the small loudspeaker became more distinct.

"As yet," the President went on, "the Junior Effect is unexplained. However, I must beg you to exercise the utmost restraint as parents during this trying period of relationship with the American child.

We must temper our every action with deliberation.

"I must also caution you to put no stock in such spurious explanations that would connect the behavior of our children with the increased sightings of unidentified objects. There is absolutely no justification for correlating the two phenomena—as of this moment."

In grim silence, we dispersed from the playground. Turning toward home, I couldn't help but think back on the President's closing words. Were they merely in the nature of an initial denial which was intended only to prepare the way for eventual acceptance of that which was being denied?

Ellen and the children were asleep—looking so much like exhausted rag-dolls that had been tossed onto Wally's bed. Her hair was disheveled and her face streaked with near-dry tears as she lay with an arm extended protectively over each of the children.

Downstairs, I poured a stiff bourbon and turned on the kitchen radio. Then I unwrapped my Winchester sixteen-gauge pump-action and got out the gun-cleaning kit.

While I checked my supply of shells, I listened to the early evening newscaster tell how Radio Moscow was convinced the Junior Effect was a capitalist plot. It was

a belated indictment, though, the announcer explained, inasmuch as the West European Allies had already dispatched diplomatic notes to the Kremlin hinting openly at Russian complicity.

The phone rang.

"FRANK?—ANDY. I just wanted to say don't bother with coming down to the office until—after Sunday. The single men can fill in until then."

"How's Freddy?"

"He won't talk with us. But I'm not trying to whip it out of him any longer, thank God."

"Hear the President's message?"

"Yeah. Did you get the impression he might be hiding something?"

Then Andy had noticed it too. "The unidentified objects?" I asked uneasily.

He was silent for a while. I realized how stereotyped adult behavior was—like sheep. At almost the same time we had all noticed the Junior Effect. Then, as one, we had starkly recognized its seriousness. Were we now going to follow the pattern of mass reaction by grasping the unidentified objects explanation as though on signal?

"Good God, Frank! Are we going to believe beings from—from another world are trying to snatch our kids?—What for?"

I remembered the encyclopedia article on the Children's Crusade. It came back with a sickening impact. "Slaves," I whispered hesitantly.

"Slaves! If they're so all-fired smart, won't they have machines to do everything?"

"We can't conceive of a machine that would be as perfect, as economical as the human body and mind. Maybe they can't either."

"But why just the children?"

"Could be adults aren't wanted because they'd resist doggedly, whereas kids would be controllable and relatively harmless. You could attract and train them by playing on their imagination, their gullibility, until they were hypnotized into submission."

"Damn!" he muttered helplessly but credulously.

"They could be using this hypnotism to make the children *want* to go away," I suggested.

"Maybe that's it—a sort of a Pied Piper effect. Freddy's been talking in his sleep of some kind of paradise where he'll learn how to be a star quarterback."

I remember Baby Jean's somniloquy on "happy landing on a chocolate bar."

"But why wait until Sunday?" Andy asked, puzzled. "Why not just snatch them outright?"

I reflected on it a moment. "They might figure they'd have a lot of

trouble on their hands . . . trouble they could avoid by hypnotic indoctrination that would make the kids *anxious* to cooperate."

His voice hissed out despairingly through the receiver. "Hell, it's too incredible! You think we ought to tell somebody what we figured out?"

I shrugged indifferently. "No use. Whatever we can deduce, the rest of the country will be deducing at about the same time."

"What are we going to do?"

The shotgun was still in my lap. I gripped it determinedly. "Whatever's trying to take my kids away is going to have a hell of a job getting close enough to lay hands on them Sunday," I vowed.

The local announcer broke in harshly on the program of recorded music. "A formation of unidentified objects has been sighted over the city and is still in view. Approaching from the north—"

I slammed the receiver down and raced outside. Shielding my eyes against the street lamp, I scanned the sky and located a diamond-shaped cluster of pale green crescents that at first seemed to be part of the Big Dipper. They moved eastward, circled right and disappeared behind a low cloud that reflected the pink neon glow of the city.

Back inside, I poured another drink.

THERE WAS breakfast of a sort Friday morning. Ellen was haggard and her face was drawn as Wally and Baby Jean sat across from us like silent strangers.

I said nothing, wondering how I could tell Ellen of my conviction on the fantasy of other-world creatures. But from the way she glanced repeatedly out the window into the sky, I realized I wouldn't have to. She had been up earlier than the rest of us. And she had evidently heard newcasts reflecting general adoption of the theory Andy and I had fabricated.

Unobtrusively, I studied the children. Their behavior of the past few days—was it their own? Was it their honest reaction to a belief that they were going to be whisked away to some never-never Utopia? Or was it an attitude engrained hypnotically to help them resist adult coercion during this period of control?

Wally *had* hurled his accusations on the disillusionment of Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny pretty methodically, as though they had been advanced *through* him by a mind more logically mature.

"No school again, Mommy?" Baby Jean asked.

Ellen shook her head dourly, her lips compressed.

"Won't ever be any more school," Wally said vauntingly.

Ellen reached over and gripped

his hand. "Wally, don't you love your mother and father?" she implored.

He lowered his eyes. "Course I love you."

"And you want to go away?"

"Doesn't mean I don't love you. They said you'd come later on. And they said whenever we wanted to we could come back."

"Who," I demanded exasperatedly, "are they?"

But Ellen signaled for noninterference. "Don't you see, Wally, they're just telling you that? They're lying."

"They said you'd say that."

"Why would we lie to you, darling?"

"Because you want us to stay home." His voice was becoming accusative again. "Because you want us to go to school. And you like to make us go to bed early and boss us around."

"You want us to stay," Baby Jean chimed in, "so you can spank us and punish us and be mean to us."

I banged my fist on the table and the plates clattered and the silverware tingled. "Your mother and I are not devils!" I shouted.

The children said nothing. But their doubting incriminating eyes burned into ours.

Ellen walked around and knelt between their chairs, placing her arms around their shoulders. So

you're not going to go to school?" she began patiently. "And you're not going to get any spankings? And you won't be punished?—What *will* you do?"

Baby Jean's eyes brightened and she clapped her hands delightedly. "Every day is gonna be just like Christmas—even if there isn't any Santa Claus!"

"And," Wally exclaimed, looking avidly into his mother's face. "We'll get a new toy from the tree each morning. Then all the boys will go out on a big field and play!"

Baby Jean laughed. "And there'll be dolls and candy and a party every day after lunch!"

Wally scowled. "And no afternoon naps during the summer!"

"And we can each have a kitten and a puppy and a parakeet—"

"And stay up as late as we want every night—"

"And play games until midnight—"

"And—"

"Oh, God!" I moaned.

Ellen was crying and pressing their heads against her cheeks. "Oh, my darlings! Don't you see they're just telling you these things so you'll *want* to go away with them?"

Wally drew back. "They're telling the truth! It's not like when you make a promise. . . we have to wait and see whether you'll remember. When *they* tell us, we

know it's true!"

"How do you know it's true?" I asked.

"We just know." Wally folded his arms.

"Sometimes they show us pictures," Baby Jean offered.

"And sometimes we just feel it—like feeling happy inside."

I rose and leaned over the table. "Where do they show you these pictures?"

"Mostly at night, just before Baby Jean and I go to sleep. But plenty of times when we close our eyes it's all there—the big tree with all the lights and the swimming pool and the picture shows and circuses and—"

Baby Jean giggled, "—and the candy and sodas and dolls and pretty party dresses all the time."

"—and brand new bicycles and footballs and—gee, everything!"

Helplessly, I looked down at my hands. They were trembling.

"Who are they?" I asked again.

"Aw, Daddy," Wally said, "what difference does that make?"

I paced over to the window, then back to the table. "Look, son, you remember what I told you the other night about the children who went to fight for the Holy Land. You remember what happened to them; how—"

But the enthusiasm of the new line of argument spent itself as I realized he wasn't listening. Any-

way, *they* probably wouldn't let him be influenced by *any* argument I could advance.

I took Wally and Baby Jean by the hand and, with forced laughter, pulled them from their chairs. "Get dressed. We're going to town—all of us."

I WASN'T FAR from correct on my guess that adult reaction to the Junior Effect was, in itself, stereotyped. After all, aren't we all human beings, varying only in degree around a norm? Shouldn't it be expected that we would recognize the threat at about the same time? Try intimidation at the same time? Begin suspecting the unidentified objects almost simultaneously? And, finally, all conceive of bribery as a counter weapon within the space of a few hours?

Consequently, by mid-afternoon it was like Christmas Eve in the shopping district. Parents clung to the hands of their children as they hurried in and out of packed department stores.

Laughter and balloons—all colors and sizes and shapes.

Tiny hands juggling bags of popcorn and ice cream cones and sacks of candy and peppermint sticks.

Starched Little Miss dresses and neat Junior suits stained with the overflow of ice cream sodas and banana splits.

Games and toys and novelties and sporting goods tucked under juvenile arms.

Oversized dolls dragged inadvertently by their heels in the dust of the sidewalk.

And parents struggling with bicycles and lawn swing sets and plastic swimming pools and scooters, toy automobiles and airplanes, blackboards and even gaudily painted sleds.

But the laughter and gaiety, false though it was, was most encouraging of all on that insane fall day.

It was a buying spree unequaled in history—a mania that swept clean store shelves and warehouses; depleted supplies in all soda fountains and candy and pastry shops, and presented the theaters, which had managed to bill all-cartoon shows, with aisle jamming crowds.

The delirium subsided and we fought our way through the sidewalk throngs back to the parking lot. I was burdened with a twenty-six inch bicycle, a walking doll and another that talked, a nine-foot tent, two pairs of skates and a microscope set.

Ellen carried packages stacked from her waist to her chin. But, above the heap, there was a confident smile on her tired face.

Wally and Baby Jean squeezed into the back seat with their loot and I drove toward home, allowing

myself the delusive impression that it was all a stupendous fraud—a universal juvenile conspiracy aimed at gaining the effect of Christmas in September. That would have been a welcomed explanation—except that Washington had already conceded there *was* a correlation between the Junior Effect and the unidentified objects.

"Do you suppose they'll be sick with all that trash in their stomachs?" I asked.

"Let them," Ellen said with abandon. "It'll be the most welcome sickness I've ever nursed them through."

I rode in silence for a while.

"Do you think this will do it, Frank?" she asked, suddenly solicitous as she motioned toward the pile of gifts in the back.

"Of course," I reassured. "How can it miss? *They* promised the kids heaven and earth. Naturally, we can't fight that kind of attack with more promises. But we've struck back with something they *can't duplicate*—performance."

"Oh, Frank!" She gripped my arm and laid her head on my shoulder. "I'm so relieved!"

It was night when we got home, after stopping to eat out. For a long while we watched the kids playing with their toys, forgetting how tired we were.

"Time for bed, children," Ellen announced finally.

"Oh, Mommy," pleaded Baby Jean, "can I stay up a little longer?"

Ellen sighed contentedly. "Of course you may—as long as you wish."

"Past midnight?" Wally asked dubiously.

"Until dawn—and all tomorrow night too, if you want."

"Gee!" Baby Jean brushed stray hairs off her face. "Oh, Mommy, can we have a Christmas tree? It's so much like Christmas?"

"One Christmas tree coming up." Ellen looked over at me, smiling.

I knew a thicket on the edge of town where I could find a pine sapling that might do. And there were ornaments and decorations and tinsel in the attic.

I reached for my coat. "One tree, coming up."

Ellen knelt and hugged the children happily. "You'll have your tree tomorrow morning and Sunday morning and Monday morning and—"

"Oh, no, Mommy," objected Baby Jean.

Ellen tensed. "Why not?"

Wally traced the floral design on the rug with his toe. "Because we won't be here Monday."

NEEDLESS TO say, there was no Christmas tree Saturday morning.

I had left the house several

times before dawn, but only to stand trembling in the cool night air and stare up apprehensively at diamond-shaped formations of wraith-like objects.

The children were disappointed about the tree. Baby Jean sulked and I caught Wally staring at me several times in silent incrimination.

Ellen, distressed and ill and totally beaten, spent the better part of the morning in bed, calling hoarsely for the children. Most of the times they went to her. I suppose their basic goodness and sympathy showed through, even despite the invisible bonds that were twisting their attitude and warping their behavior.

During mid-morning, the Corps Area Commander came on television to explain what was being done in the way of eleventh-hour preparations. His face was strained; his hair mussed; his uniform rumpled.

"Because of the nature of the emergency," he said, "defense measures have been left to the discretion of each Army corps, with certain basic strategems to be followed as directed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff. . ."

There was a heavy rumbling outside and I missed part of the message as I went to the window to watch three mobile anti-aircraft guns being towed down the street. One was unhitched and left in the

lot at the corner. Another was dropped off at the next intersection.

". . . In all probability," the general was saying when I returned, "the enemy's strategy is aimed at striking *panic*—a panic that would force us to herd our children into compact groups and lock them away in public buildings or schools or jails . . . in effect, *to assemble them conveniently for him*."

"But we will not play into his hands. Instead, our children will remain as dispersed as they are now. Every available defensive weapon and troop is being scattered among the population centers in the event that the enemy elects to execute his coup despite our refusal to corral his victims for him."

The general accepted a cup of coffee from a hand that appeared on one side of the screen. He gulped it down and placed the cup on his desk.

"I need not emphasize," he went on, "that every man will be expected to participate in the defense. Whatever small arms are available will be distributed to supplement private weapons."

Then he stared intently into the camera. "This," he said somberly, "is war. It differs from war only in that we are fortunate in knowing the attack will come Sunday afternoon."

Martial music came through the

speaker as a placard, reading "Stand by For Further Bulletins," occupied the screen.

Numbly, I went out on the porch and down the steps to the sidewalk. Neighbors were out there too, with the exception of the children who were all apparently confined to the house. But we said nothing to one another.

A squadron of jets flew by overhead; then another, followed by a formation of troop-carrying transports that broke off one by one and glided down toward the airport.

A mobile rocket-launching platform turned off a side street and took up station in the middle of the block. Three helicopters dropped swiftly onto the playground two blocks away and disgorged fully equipped infantrymen. In the distance, tanks rumbled down the avenue.

But, as though in a display of mockery, a fleet of alien craft approached from the south and hung motionless high over the city, like silvery leaves scintillating in the sunlight.

A flight of jets turned sharply and climbed, climbed, climbed—until the planes too were but faint specks. And still they had not reached the thirty or forty objects. The things up there must have been as large as battleships.

Finally the planes drew near and the enemy retreated. A heartening

cheer went up from the neighborhood.

A hand touched my sleeve. It was Ellen, clutching her robe tightly about her. But there was no longer terror in her eyes—only wonderment.

"They're running away!" she exclaimed, staring up.

And confidence appeared on her pale face as she noticed the rocket-launching platform and the AA guns, the tanks on the play-ground and the soldiers pitching tents in the vacant lot.

"They're not going to get through, Ellen!" I exclaimed, feeling suddenly confident. "They would have made it if we had fallen into their trap and assembled the children. But now they'll have to disperse to pick up the kids. But if they separate and land, we'll pick them off!"

WE STAYED up all night and Sunday morning came bright and clear. At eight o'clock we finished the last pot of coffee and Ellen said, "Time to get the children up and dressed for church."

"We're not going. Church is a gathering place. We'll be safer here . . . And, Ellen, let's act as normal as possible before the kids. They'll be in for an awful disappointment when they realize they're not going to get all the things they've been promised."

She placed her hands on my shoulders. "I'll try, darling."

I kissed her. Then she called the children for breakfast.

When they came down, their faces were transfigured with expectancy. While they ate, Ellen went up to dress. I was glad she hadn't stayed to hear their conversation. It would have plunged her back into a state of depression.

"Shall we take any clothes?" asked Baby Jean, finger tentatively held against her dimpled chin.

Wally laughed. "Are you silly? With all those party dresses waiting? And a football uniform for me?"

"Oh, Wally! What are we going to do when we get there?"

"I suppose we'll help decorate the tree for tomorrow."

"And then?"

"There'll be a big bonfire with marshmallows and wieners and they'll tell us stories for the rest of the night."

Their conversation didn't reflect any change of plans by *them*. Despondently, I went outside and propped the ladder against the house. With planks from the garage, I boarded up the window of the children's room.

When I finished, Hank Collins was following suit next door. Then hammering sounded from a house in the back—and another in the next block. Presently the pounding

of nails into boards was a hollow staccato that reverberated dismally throughout the otherwise silent city. This hasty preparation of final sanctuaries for the children—was it another manifestation of mass reactive behavior? A frantic measure that was being repeated throughout the country—all over the world?

The Collins baby began crying dolefully behind the barred window as I went down the driveway to the front of the house.

A company of soldiers marched by and disbanded at the corner. They infiltrated the neighborhood, taking up posts in alleys, on steps, in back yards and along the sidewalks. Minutes later they were joined by a contingent of Marines.

The whine of jets welled in the portentously still sky as anti-aircraft and machine gun muzzles swung through their arcs, like awakening warriors flexing their muscles.

But there was no sign of anything alien. Had they given up? Had they realized we'd outmaneuvered them? Or had they simply revised their strategy to compensate for our decentralization of defenses?

At noon we had a light lunch, the children eating in strained silence. Understandably, Ellen had forgotten to shop for Sunday dinner.

Later, as we cleared the table, the Collins baby began crying again,

her voice carrying startlingly loud through the unnatural calm of the neighborhood.

"I wish she'd stop," I exclaimed irritably.

Ellen stared off into the distance, clenching her fists. "I don't."

I realized I didn't either; that I desperately wanted to hear the baby cry all that day and throughout the night too.

"All right, children," I said abruptly. "Up to your room."

"But Daddy," Baby Jean protested, "we *can't* go to our room—not *now!*"

"I won't go!" Wally backed away fearfully; turned and broke for the door.

But I grabbed his wrist while Ellen gathered up Baby Jean. We carried them, struggling, up the stairs. They cried for a while after we locked their door, but eventually the worn recorded strains of "The Good Ship Lollipop" rose to supplant Baby Jean's final sobs.

"You stay in the house," I told Ellen as I got the shotgun from the hall closet.

On the sidewalk I drew up next to a soldier with a grenade kit and watched neighbors treading cautiously down their steps or standing hesitantly in front of their homes—grim, silent men whom I had known for years but who were now like strangers in their pre-occupation with the incredible. They

bore an assortment of weapons—shotguns, rifles, pistols, even kitchen knives.

"Any signs yet?" I asked the soldier.

"Nothing." He squinted upward. "Is it afternoon?"

"Just past twelve."

He unslung his rifle.

Hank Collins wandered by without noticing us and went over to the AA crew.

We waited . . . Twelve-thirty. One. One-thirty. Two.

THEN THEY came—a cluster of faint silvery specks just above the eastern horizon. Three groups of jets veered frantically and raced off to intercept them—but ever so slowly.

The objects rose higher as the planes, now indistinct dots, strained to reach their targets. Four AA guns swung anxiously through their arcs, waiting.

"God!" I muttered. "They're coming anyway!"

"But they'll never get down!" the soldier with the grenades vowed. Then he added, more dubiously, "Will they?"

The voice of the neighborhood was a din of fearful expletives and derisive threats hurled at the alien craft, hardly more than motes against the cloudless blue as they hung motionless above the city.

Then suddenly they began in-

creasing in size, spreading gradually apart as they descended.

Hank Collins swore and grabbed the arm of an anti-aircraft gunner. "Shoot, damn it!" he cried.

A sergeant at the mobile radar unit shouted something about excessive range and a hundred-thousand feet.

Hank swore again and raised his shotgun in desperation. It recoiled six times and the ejected shells clattered dully on the concrete. He reloaded.

Now the objects were visible discs, covering the city in a radial pattern like the skeleton of an umbrella—hovering, descending no longer. I counted more than thirty of them before the AA batteries opened fire.

Houses shook and window panes rattled and the stench of burnt powder pervaded the air as the angry guns thundered out in a sustained barrage, interrupted only by the report of larger artillery in the distance.

Stream after stream of fiery projectiles streaked out from the rocket-launching platform, leaving the platform itself engulfed in a cloud of acrid smoke.

But somehow none of the missiles reached their targets.

The jets closed in and, with startling abruptness, the ground attack stopped.

In the profound, ear-ringing sil-

ence, the Collins baby's cries were a bizarre sound that clung to the still, heavy air.

Gray tracers of rockets streaked from the planes toward the objects, like a myriad spider-web strands glistening in the sun. But none of them scored hits, for suddenly the alien things were gone—decreasing in size as they withdrew with incredible speed.

The baby quit crying.

"They're leaving!" a thousand voices rose in chorus, then cheered.

But a woman's scream sounded from a house across the street—another down the block. Then I heard Ellen's terrified scream.

Appalled, I raced back inside and up the stairs, guided by her shrill cries.

She was pounding on the children's door.

"The key, Frank! Give me the key!"

I handed it to her and she got the door unlocked and swung it wide.

The room was empty, streaks of light slanting in through the boarded window.

Baby Jean's teddy bear hung half off the bed. Wally's new bicycle leaned against the far wall.

With jerky steps, the pink-skin walking doll trudged across the carpet, gears whirring and head turning from side to side. The spring ran down and it stood staring plaintively at us, its arms out-

stretched in a pleading gesture.

The record rasped in its worn groove:

"On the good ship Lollipop the good ship Lollipop the good ship Lolli . . ."

IT'S BEEN almost fifteen years now since the day the children went away. Slowly, so they tell us, things are getting back to normal. It won't be long before the effects are totally erased—not more than two or three generations, according to the sociologists.

Life, of course, is different—not at all comparable with existence as it was in the Fifties. Actually, now, in the Seventies, we're as far removed from the Fifties as the Fifties were from the Middle Ages.

Economists use figures to explain that it all has to do with the labor market. The children who went away comprised roughly a fifth of the population. As kids, they had no effect on the economy.

But they wouldn't be children now. Instead, they would make up the fifteen-to-thirty age group, which would be a third of the productive population. Malthus would have a field day if he were around.

Admittedly, wages are high because those eligible to earn money are scarce. But . . . well, do you think a pair of shoes is worth a week's salary as a construction worker—four hundred and eighty dol-

lars? We do quite well, though, with burlap. The trick is in tying it not too loose and not too tight at the ankle. We don't mind the shoes, however, since we have to improvise on almost all articles of necessity.

And, oh yes, horses have become quite popular again.

Other features of existence aren't quite as palatable—labor conscription, for instance, and federal prohibition of retirement except for the totally disabled.

What did we do after the children left? The answer's simple . . . we had more children. Fast. That was necessary if we were going to recoup economically within a foreseeable period. And it was also balm for the mass anguish that followed after the children left.

Ellen and I, coincidentally, had a boy and a girl. The first was born three years after the year of the Junior Effect. Suckers for sentimentality, we named him Wallace. The girl we named Jean.

And they're so much like the originals that we sometimes even forget about the first two.

Just last night, for instance, Baby Jean (we still call her that, even though she's ten) looked up from her studies. And the lamp light flickered in an oddly reminiscent way on her thin face.

"Daddy," she asked soberly, "will you miss Wally and me?"

★ H-Bomb Limit ★

Atomic bombs had their destructive power measured in kilotons. Hydrogen bombs have their destructive power measured in "Megatons", that is in the equivalent amount of exploding TNT. One might think that such destructive power would be limitless since it is rumored that Hydrogen bombs can be made in the hundreds of Megaton sizes.

Fortunately that is not the case. There is a limiting principle which prevents such a bomb from destroying greater areas. It is the fact that the atmosphere acts as a safety valve.

No matter how big you make the

explosion when it reaches a certain value, its explosive effect follows the path of least resistance, so to speak, and vents itself *upward* against the atmosphere, literally blowing itself out into space. Double the size of the bomb and the extra explosive power goes up and out. As a consequence, it is believed that no matter how large the hydrogen bomb, an area greater than about twenty or thirty miles in diameter cannot be destroyed. Hideous as this conception is, it does mitigate against the nightmare of destroying an entire state, say, with one stroke!

* * *



"I hate to say this, but I'm beginning to like its looks!"

THE PIONEER

by

Irving Cox, Jr.

Greg was sure the kids had no right being in control of a planet; afterall what had they learned about life? Still, what had he learned?

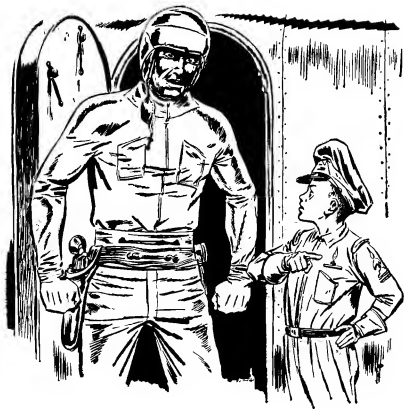
THE old ship wheezed and clattered into the landing slot. Greg was an expert pilot, but skill was no substitute for outdated equipment. He unstrapped the safety webbing and eased himself out of the cabin, cluttered with its worn and scarred electronic gadgetry. With the handcrank he opened the airlock. Rusting metal screamed as the panel slid back into the hull. Greg found himself panting from the sudden muscular effort in the heavier atmosphere of the earth.

I'm an old man, he thought bitterly — old at forty; as antiquated as my ship, and as much in need of repair. But no one can do anything for either of us. I gave them the stars, and in twenty years they've forgotten. They've made me a museum piece, these pampered, undersized kids of the new

generation.

Greg walked down the ramp. He hadn't been home for seven years, but he was still surprised that no flight inspector met him with the officious clipboard of check-out sheets. The landing fields in the colonies were far more efficiently supervised.

Greg saw a light in the field control building and walked toward it. The field, sprawling for miles across the California desert, was empty, a mocking moment to the magnificent dream the new generation had rejected. Behind him Greg saw the long rows of landing slots, towering metal shafts raised against the night sky. Only four ships rested in the slots, his and three other rusting cargo carriers. In front of the unlighted terminal building the passenger liners stood untended, decaying



hulks that would never lift again. Fifteen years ago — even as recently as ten years ago — the California field had hummed with activity. Greg could remember the tide of humanity, the clattering pick-up trucks gliding like curious ants among the freighters, the shotgun blast of lift tubes, the parade of ships trailing flame across the

sky.

Now the dream was gone. The terminal windows were filmed with dust. Grass grew in the cracking asphalt of the field.

Greg pushed open the door of the control building. One man sat with his feet propped on a desk. Once the room had required a hundred technicians. Once the traffic-con-

trol panel, filling a wall nearly a quarter of a mile long, had been a maze of dancing, colored lights. Now the board was dead; the enamel was peeling; the exposed metal was red with rust.

The attendant took Greg's manifest without interest. "You're our first landing in two years, Captain —" He glanced at the sheet. "Captain Greg. I see you're in from Mars."

"I'm carrying five tons of Red-earth." In the old days such a cargo would have cleared three million after transportation costs; a whole new industry had been built on the Martian antibiotal spore.

"No market, I'm afraid, Captain." The attendant flipped the manifest aside.

"Sell it at auction. I have to raise enough cash to —"

"You won't get a buyer."

"I've got to get some new equipment for my ship!"

"You'd have done better in the colonies. Mars has excellent repair facilities, we understand."

"At sky-high prices, sure."

"The earth isn't building flight equipment any more. What's the point? The kids don't want it." The attendant shrugged his shoulders. "You aren't the first one, Captain Greg, who's come home for nothing; and you won't be the last. Check with me tomorrow. I'll

see what I can work out."

"If I can't dispose of my cargo —"

"We waive all field charges in cases of destitution. You can dump the Redearth and the kids will stake you to a cargo of iron ore; it's going at triple premium on Venus, we're told."

GREG turned on his heel and walked stiffly out of the building. One bitter word burned in his mind: destitution. It was like a kick in the teeth. He thought, in a fury of blind anger, I gave them the stars and they make me a charity case — this new generation! Children who could never build a colonial bubble or pioneer a star route. Soft-minded and soft-muscled idiots.

The field attendant hadn't even recognized Greg's name.

Suddenly the past was alive again, like an angry nightmare. The speeches and the headlines, the bands and the screaming mobs, the politicians, the scientists, the generals. Handclasps and newsreel pictures. "Just one more, sir, for the TV cameras." . . . "A Citation by a joint session of the Congress of the United States, to Captain Victor Greg, U. S. Rocket Forces . . ." GREG MAKES MARS . . . L. A. WELCOMES GREG . . . FIRST SPACEMAN IN N. Y. PARADE . . . "And I

say to you, my constituents, the name Greg shall be forever writ large in the hearts of a grateful people." . . . GREG LANDS

FIRST MARTIAN CARGO . . .

"For the discovery of Redearth, the eternal gratitude of the medical profession . . ."

GREG TAKES NOBEL PRIZE . . . "A

small token of the gratitude of American industry . . ."

GREG JOINS IMPORT FIRM . . . "The

undying gratitude of the United Patriotic Mothers of America

. . ."

FIRST COLONISTS ON

MARS . . . COLONIES ON THE

MOONS OF JUPITER . . .

VENUS BUBBLE COMPLETED

. . .

The dream of yesterday, and the dream was gone. The rocket ports were dead. The machines were crumbling into rust. And Captain Victor Greg? — a destitute tramp, waiting for a handout from a generation of brats which had forgotten him.

He crossed the field toward the clutter of buildings beyond the terminal: Port City, raised in less than a year on the California desert, the first minor miracle of the new frontier. The endless mass of traffic, the noisy honky tonks, the nervous neon shimmering in the night, the brassy bands and the fancy women — all of it was gone. Desert sand had drifted across the streets. The highpoled intersection

lights, still burning, cast a blue halo in the empty, dirty windows.

Greg's shoulders sagged as he walked toward the central square of Port City. He had to see the monument again. He had to drain the last bitterness from his homecoming. In the Martian colony they had told him it would be like this. He hadn't believed them. How could a legend be forgotten in a generation?

From a block away he saw the metal statue, turned a sickly blue by the corner street light. The high shaft of a primitive rocket ship, with its nose foregear lifted proudly toward the stars; in the foreground, the towering giant of a spaceman, his legs spread wide to embrace the symbolic sphere of the earth. "Sky Frontier"; the sculptor had named it that.

Greg sat wearily on the granite base of the monument. He could read, all too clearly, the lettering on the plaque, "Commemorating the first solar flight, earth to Mars, made by Captain Victor Greg of the U. S. Rocket Fleet. Launched from this site on the first day of June and completed —"

Greg ground his fists against his eyes, yet still the words danced through his brain. His attitude of dejection was an ironic counterpoint to the confident, metal monster rising above him. Twenty

years and a new generation made the difference. Yet there was a striking similarity between the statue and the man, for Greg had posed for the original model. Greg was still a powerful, muscular man; his face was still clean cut and unlined. Only the torment in his eyes reflected the dream he had lost.

"But nothing is lost. It is just — different."

Greg looked up. A serious-faced boy of twelve stood close to him, in the shadow of the statue. One of the new children. Greg felt a cold chill crawl up his spine. Fear and loathing: he hated them. They had destroyed his world; they had made him a nonentity. Yet when the boy came closer and Greg saw how frail and small he was, the fear seemed foolish.

"You live around here, kid?" Greg asked. Out in the colonies they said the new children read minds — which really wasn't much, considering their other abilities — but Greg refused to believe it.

"Not minds," the boy corrected him. "We know your feelings — which is probably much the same thing. No, I don't live in Port City. I came from Chicago after you landed; I thought you might need me."

From Chicago! — fifteen hundred miles, the instantaneous transportation of living matter.

Greg's mind boggled at the familiar fact; he felt the hate and the fear again. These were not the natural children of men, but monstrosities spawned by an unknown universe and eating out the heart of human culture. Greg stood up, his arms stiff and his fists clenched. "When I need the help of a kid," he growled, "I'll know it's time to cash in my chips."

"It's wrong to think that way, Captain Greg."

"No pint-sized child's going to tell me —"

"I wanted to make things easier for you. You should have stayed in the colonies; it was a mistake to come home."

"Now you're trying to drive us off the earth!"

"We want to save you the discomfort of homecoming. We can't turn back the clock; neither can you."

GREG strode down the deserted street, through the small drifts of sand. He recognized the corner where there used to be a bar. He flung open the door and entered the long, dark room. The stale air smelled of dust and neglect; his boots echoed hollowly on the oak floor. He fumbled for a match and in the pale, yellow light he saw the bottles crowding the shelves.

He snatched a fifth of bourbon and ripped off the cap. He gulped

the liquor thirstily and the hot fire burned warm in his veins. After the third drink he felt the strong self-confidence of his manhood again. He leaned his elbow against the bar and glanced toward the street. The sad-eyed kid was out there somewhere, waiting like a nightmare; or maybe he had already done his magic and transported himself back to Chicago.

It didn't matter. The kid wasn't human. Greg took another pull at the bottle and he saw it all very clearly. In the beginning men had speculated about life forms on other worlds. Before Greg's pioneering flight to Mars the Sunday supplements had been filled with a vast number of lurid speculations. Yet the spacemen had found nothing but virgin worlds which became the colonies of man. The truth was — Greg understood it now — they had looked for intelligent life in familiar forms. But there had been something out there, something as undetectable as a virus epidemic — and as deadly. It had invaded the earth and captured the minds of the children.

Greg killed the bottle. By that time he was very impressed with the brilliance of his own reasoning. Small inconsistencies kept nagging at his mind and it seemed strange that no one had ever thought of it before — but all that was of no consequence.

Greg heard footsteps outside. His body tensed. Was it the kid coming back? He would know what Greg was thinking; he would know how close Greg was to the real truth. And the new children — no, invaders; Greg must remember that — would not let him survive. They were puny and undersized. Physically, Greg had no reason to be afraid of them. But how was he to fight an enemy who could instantly disappear and rematerialize thousands—or millions—of miles away?

The shuffling steps came closer. A stooped, white-haired man, wearing soiled and unpressed tweeds, stepped through the door. Greg seized the newcomer's shoulder; the man gave a bleat of animal terror.

"Who the hell are you?" Greg demanded.

"Dr. Vayle — Adrian Vayle."

"The astrophysicist?" Greg remembered the name from the ponderous text he had studied in the flight school.

The old man straightened his shoulders with a semblance of pride. "You know me?"

"What are you doing in Port City?"

"This is where I live. I couldn't stand it in the city any longer and I didn't want to emigrate to the colonies. The children don't object. They bring us supplies. Holly

and I are quite comfortable." Dr. Vayle ran his fingers over Greg's uniform. "You're a pilot! I haven't met one in years. Usually the children send them back to the colonies as soon as they land."

"Where do you live, Dr. Vayle?"

"The best hotel in town. I'll show you." He bent closer and whispered, "And I'll let you see what we're working on. But I have to have my nightcap first." Vayle groped in the dark for a bottle. He drank the liquor eagerly, wiping his lips on his sleeve.

Greg and the astrophysicist went outside. Greg looked along the deserted street for the twelve year old, but the boy was nowhere in sight. Perhaps he had returned to Chicago. Yet if he had come to send Greg back to the colonies, would he have given up so easily?

The blue intersection lights swam in a comfortable haze, spinning when Greg looked at them directly. Occasionally the drifts of sand seemed to run like water and Greg became unsure of his footing. He knew he was drunk, but alcohol had never interfered with his reasoning. Back in the bar he had made a tremendous discovery; he mustn't let it slip his mind. The children were alien invaders: that was it. In the morning he would be able to decide what he was to do with the information.

The old man took him to a pse-

udo-Spanish structure across the main highway from the field. The *Biltmore Hacienda*, at one time the gaudiest and costliest hotel in Port City. Now the neon signs were out, the streetfront shops were closed, and only a pale light glowed dimly behind the ornate, iron gate.

AS he followed Vayle up the three tile steps, Greg looked back toward the field. He saw his ship standing in its landing slot. Someone was working to unload his useless cargo of Redearth. The field attendant was displaying an unusual conscientiousness, Greg thought; he hadn't expected action in less than a week.

Then, abruptly, Greg knew the real significance of such prompt service. It fit with the discovery he had made in the bar. The only trouble was, his mind was too hazy for him to grasp the connection clearly. It would come to him later; he was sure of that.

He followed Vayle through the dusty, thick-carpeted lobby. Vayle slept in a disorderly room adjoining the cavernous hall of the dining room, where the tables were covered with dust and the band instruments lay rusting on the bandstand. The astrophysicist swept a litter of loose manuscript pages from his bed and sat down. He fished a bottle of gin from un-

der the bed and took a long drink.

"For my nerves," he apologized.

Greg saw a score of empty bottles in the debris on the floor. Apparently Vayle had been treating his nerves for a long time. Greg picked up one of the manuscript pages. It was a part of a book. At least the patter of phrases was familiar, but the whole context was incoherent, without beginning or end.

"My new text," Vayle explained. "When it's finished, the kids have promised to publish it. That's why they let me stay here, so I can work in peace." He pulled at the bottle again. "They're still children at heart. An adult can twist them around his finger, if he goes at it properly."

"You mean the book's just a blind?"

The scientist eyed Greg carefully. "You're too old. You can't be one of them." He rolled back the mattress and took out a thin file of paper, holding it tenderly in his hand. "I'm analyzing the cause, sir. I'm going to demonstrate how the children have made us believe they are able to defy the laws of physics. When I publish this, the nightmare will be over."

Vayle handed over the file reluctantly. Greg turned back the cover — and the shock sobered him. Vayle was an established authority; Vayle was an eminent sci-

entist; Vayle was a man Greg had learned to respect. But the book Vayle showed him contained nothing but blank pages.

"You're interested in our project?"

The throaty, silky voice came from the open door. Greg whirled. He saw a tall, thin woman, heavily painted. She was wearing a bangled, scarlet gown, which hung loose from her shoulders. Her beauty had faded long ago; her face was a lined, marble mask; her yellow hair was streaked with gray. Fifteen years ago Greg could have found her counterpart lurking in any Port City honky tonk, her thin hips swaying with the brassy jargon of the music and invitation in her eyes.

"This is Holly Wilson," Vayle said. "My secretary."

Secretary! Greg thought. So that's what they were calling it now. Holly Wilson's profession had gone by many names. The pickings on earth must have become mighty thin, if she were satisfied to saddle herself with a white-haired professor of astrophysics. Greg introduced himself, grinning contemptuously.

"You're just in from the colonies, Captain?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Staying long?"

"That depends. I have a cargo to auction and —"

"The kids will take care of that. But you'll stay through tonight, of course. Let's see if we can find you a room."

Greg thought he knew what she had in mind. But as soon as they were out of earshot of the scientist's bedroom, she said, "Come outside, Captain; I have to talk to you."

They went into the tiled patio of the hotel. The kidney-shaped pool was empty, and its basin was criss-crossed with gaping cracks. Many of the potted shrubs had died untended, but the palms still flourished. The fronds laced skeletal fingers across the face of the full moon. The dry, desert wind washed through the trees, the ghost whisper of the dream that had died in Port City.

"Don't say anything to Dr. Vayle about his book." Holly Wilson's voice was surprisingly sincere. "Play along with him, please; let him go on thinking he's found the great secret."

"What is it — alcoholism or madness?"

"A little of both. No one's really sane any more."

"I came home the last time seven years ago. It wasn't this bad then. What's happened?"

"Most of the adults have emigrated to the colonies. There are only a few derelicts left — like Adrian Vayle and myself."

NEARLY sober, Greg remembered the discovery he had stumbled on in the bar, and the logic still held up. "They've taken over the earth and thrown men out."

"The children? You talk as if —"

"Tell me everything about it, from the beginning."

"The kids are different; that's all there is to it. They read minds. They move themselves anywhere they please simply by thinking about it. God knows what else they'll learn to whip up after they get the hang of it."

"Are all the children like this?"

"No. The others emigrated with their parents. Dr. Vayle says there are about five million. That's approximately the total population of the earth, now. They've shoved the rest of us out."

"By force?"

"Who wants to hang around like a pet ape to amuse his own brats? Dr. Vayle was too old to go. I — I couldn't get a medical clearance."

"I don't think the colonies are aware that the emigration was so large."

"Why should they be? We've half a dozen worlds out there. They could absorb us all."

"So the kids have taken over everything."

"What they wanted, yes. For a while we thought it was temporary. Dr. Vayle didn't begin drinking

until we knew the change was permanent. The oldest kids are nineteen now. They're beginning to marry, and all their children have the same abilities. Or witchcraft. Call it what you like."

"As old as nineteen? Then the change dates from —"

"From your first flight, Captain Greg. I sometimes look at that damn statue in the square and laugh till it hurts. A brave, new frontier you discovered — but that wasn't all you gave us."

"You believe I'm responsible for —" Greg gestured toward the slow decay in the patio. "For this?"

"Who else, Captain? It's the kids who should build you a monument. You gave them the earth."

For the first time Greg saw the monstrosity hidden by his dream. He had made the pioneer flight; and he had created this new generation. The relationship was plain. If he could unravel it and find the real cause — but he knew that now. An invasion, an invisible virus life that had taken over their minds. How? When he knew that, how could he fight it? How could he turn back the clock and restore the earth to man?

He walked slowly to the end of the patio where he could see the deserted field across the highway. In the slot they were still scooping the Redearth of Mars out of the hull of his ship. He smiled grimly.

A decade ago the Redearth had been priceless; that one import alone had made the conquest of space commercially possible. Redearth had built Port City and the colonies; Redearth had created the import companies, once so tremendously profitable.

A light burned for a moment above Greg's ship. Clearly he saw the puny, twelve year old boy and the four other children who were dumping the cargo. It gave him another explosive insight. Greg knew then how the invasion had come from the stars.

The Redearth of Mars; the invisible molds of that unknown world: that was the alien life form no man had recognized. The enemy was tangible. The enemy was real. And such an enemy could be conquered.

Greg's first inclination was to cross the road and smash with his fist the pint-sized weaklings who had stolen his world. Physical conflict: that was something man understood and respected. But the children were not human; he must never allow himself to forget that. They had to be fought on other terms.

First, Greg had to escape the earth without letting them read his mind and measure his hatred. Until he could lift his ship, he had to play along with whatever plans they made for him. The children

didn't want him here; escape should be easy—if he could only wall off his thinking.

He turned back toward the faded woman in the scarlet dress. As matter-of-factly as he could, he asked her to show him his room. "I'll probably leave tomorrow; they're doing an efficient job out there."

"The kids don't waste any time. They'll stake you to a cargo of iron ore for Venus; that's the usual procedure." She put her arm through his. "And you promise, Captain: you won't say anything to Dr. Vayle?"

"Why are you so interested in that old fool?"

"We're derelicts. It would be damn lonely without him. He has something to believe in — nonsense, yes; but what difference does that make? Sometimes I can almost believe in it, too."

"Men aren't licked yet."

She laughed. "You noble souls who drop in on us out of space talk so bravely; that's your brand of madness, Captain. Thank your stars you don't have to get to know the kids as well as we do."

SHE took him to a room on the first floor of the hotel. The air, when he opened the door, was stale. The full moon behind the venetian blinds made an unpleasant symbolic shadow pattern of

prison bars on the carpet. Greg ripped open the zipper of his flight jacket; his chest was wet with sweat. The woman turned to go and he caught her arm, pulling her toward him.

"This much at least hasn't changed," he grinned.

She neither resisted nor responded. She stood looking up into his face. Her eyes were cold and tired. "I have to go back to Adrian, Captain Greg. He's frightened when I leave him alone too long."

"That doddering graybeard—"

"None of the things that used to be so important matter any more. All we have left is our love for each other. Adrian and I have that; I don't want to lose it."

She glided away from him. Angrily Greg jerked up the blinds — to erase the prison symbol — and ground open the windows. The hot desert wind whispered through the screen. Greg stripped off his uniform and lay naked on the bed.

After a time he slept — fitfully, caught in a confusion of fragmentary dreams. The hope of yesterday and the disillusionment of now; his pride as a pioneer; and the pain of his responsibility for what his frontier had created. Out of the chaos a pattern of action slowly emerged. Sometime in the small hours before the dawn Greg made up his mind what he would do.

It would be futile to try to

arouse the colonies to attack the earth. Each man in his own soul might admit the truth, but as a culture they would all reject it. They needed to keep the symbol of earth as home, though they might never return to it. Even if that psychological objection could be overcome, war was not the answer. Only if the children were taken completely by surprise — given no time to use their alien abilities — could they be effectively destroyed.

Greg knew how that could be done. A decade before his pioneer flight to Mars, the first artificial satellite had been sent up in an orbit around the earth. A purely military weapon — capable of destroying any objective on the surface of the earth — the satellite had overturned the balance of power and forced the creation of a united world. The resources of a planetary government had made Greg's first flight possible. Afterward, in the excitement of exploiting the new frontier, the satellite had been forgotten.

But it was still there, still armed with a firepower capable of wiping the earth clean of life. It would be the murder of a world — but murder to save human kind. Greg could do it alone. His only problem was to lift his ship without the children knowing what was in his mind. He felt no guilt, no pang of conscience. Once the decision was

made, Greg slept easily; and he awoke completely refreshed, with only a slight headache from the liquor he had drunk the night before.

Dr. Vayle and Holly Wilson insisted that Greg breakfast with them in the hotel. He would have preferred to forage for himself. The painted woman's protective, maternal affection for the astrophysicist made Greg acutely uncomfortable. It was not the sort of behavior he would have expected of either of them. Greg's discomfort quickly became a feeling of guilt. If he used the old satellite wheel to destroy the alien children, he would be slaughtering the few human beings who remained on the earth. Discreetly he asked how many others had stayed behind.

"It's hard to say," Vayle told him. "A hundred thousand, perhaps."

"Do you keep up any sort of contact?"

"Why should we? We're outcasts." With a sudden rationality, he added, "We're ashamed. When we're together we feel bound to face the truth. It's impossible for man to admit he's a second-rater. So we hide out in deserted villages like this one — and pretend all this nightmare never happened." Then Vayle slipped back into his delusion again. "However, all that will be different as soon as my

research is finished. Why, do you know, Captain —"

"I'm leaving this morning," Greg broke in. "Would you like to go with me?"

Vayle shook his head. "I'm too old to make a new start on your frontier, Captain." He reached for the woman's hand. "And as long as my secretary can't have a clearance —"

"Leave us as we are," Holly said. "Your dream is no better than ours."

AFTER breakfast Greg left the hotel and crossed the highway to the field. It was still early morning, but the desert sun blazed hot in a copper sky. As Greg passed the old terminal building, the twelve year old boy suddenly materialized and fell in step beside him.

This was the thing Greg feared most. He began to walk more rapidly, fighting a rising panic. How could he keep the kid from prying into his mind? Desperately he tried to think of something else — anything, inane or banal. The children were not gods; they couldn't dig deeper than his conscious thought. (Or could they? Greg wasn't sure.)

"We're giving you a cargo for Venus," the boy said conversationally. "It will put you in business again, Captain. The Martian col-

ony is equipped to repair your ship. You'll have enough cash to pay for it, now."

"Fine," Greg grunted. In his mind he was frantically reciting a rhyme his grandmother had taught him ago, "One two, buckle my shoe; three four, open the door . . ." Reciting it with fervor, like a prayer for survival — which it was.

"After this, Captain, it might be better if you stayed in the colonies. Don't get me wrong. You're welcome on earth anytime you want to come home, but conditions are different here and . . ."

Suddenly the boy's tone changed. "But you aren't responsible, Captain!"

Greg's muscles tensed. So the boy had probed that deep!

"A new frontier always means change, Captain — but not tragedy; not defeat! We've never supposed any of you would believe that. You gave us a miracle, the greatest frontier men have ever crossed. When all the other pioneers are forgotten, Captain, your name. . . ."

Pretty words, like the pretty speeches Greg had listened to twenty years ago. They wanted to confuse him, make him doubt the decision he had made. "One two, buckle my shoe! Three four, open the door!"

The boy caught Greg's sleeve. "You might as well blame Galileo

or Copernicus because they studied the universe. Or go back to the beginning. Blame the unknown who did our first scientific pioneering."

Copernicus and Galileo? What was the kid trying to say? And why would a twelve year old speak so glibly — so knowingly — of the giants? That proved his alienness. When Greg was twelve, the only thing he had thought about seriously was football or baseball or summer vacation or how he was going to get out of the piano lessons his mother imposed on him.

The boy pulled him to a stop. "The first pioneer, Captain: do you blame him for it all? We don't know his name, but we do have his monument. Look, Captain Greg." In the drifting sand the boy sketched the outline of a wheel.

Greg panicked. He was too intent upon keeping his mind impregnable to make any other interpretation. The wheel symbolized the satellite riding above the earth; then the boy knew what Greg was going to do.

Greg swung his fist blindly. He took the boy by surprise. The child had no time to rematerialize at a safe distance. Greg's fist struck his chest and the boy went down, with a cry of agony. Greg felt a subconscious surge of satisfaction; humanity hadn't been defeated after all and the children were by no means invulnerable. Surprise —

physical initiative — gave men their trump card over these undernourished mind readers.

Greg sprinted toward his ship. The body lay on the drifting sand gasping for breath, gesturing futilely with his small hand.

Greg's foot was on the ramp when he heard a scream behind him. He looked back toward the road. He saw Dr. Vayle and Holly Wilson running toward him. A mongrel, frothing at the mouth, was yapping at their heels.

GREG reacted with an altogether human instinct. He ripped a metal bar loose from the ramp rail and went back to help them, two fellow humans in trouble. A tiny warning of logic flamed briefly in his mind: this could be a trick; his only real chance of escape was to leave now, while he could. But he ignored it.

He ran across the field and swung the bar at the dog, crushing its skull with one blow. The woman clutched his arm. Her hands were shaking; her face was white with fear.

"What happened?" Greg demanded.

"Adrian and I were clearing the breakfast table. Suddenly the dog was — he was just there, growling at us."

"A mad dog," the astrophysicist added. "The kids did it. They can

make any living thing appear anywhere they please."

"A trick!" Greg said. The whisper of logic had been right. He glanced at where the boy had fallen; the child was gone.

"They're trying to make me leave," Vayle complained, "before I finished my research. They know I have the answer to —"

"Now you have no other choice," Greg snapped. He pulled the scientist toward his ship; the woman followed. Greg reasoned that he might still have an outside chance. The children obviously had expected him to take Vayle back to the hotel. That would have given them a chance to disable his ship.

Greg pushed the two through the airlock. His luck still held. He shoved them toward the safety webbing and jerked down the firing toggle. As the ship quivered in the thunder of the power tubes, Greg dialed the satellite course on the pilot computer.

It was the simplest setting he could make. His was an old ship, built when the satellite had still been used as an initial landing station, before the new fuel had made the big wheel obsolete. Every ship had once had an automatic satellite course projection taped in the pilot computer. Without a new setting, the ship would move into the core ramp of the wheel and the lock would open automatically

when the magnetic seal was completed.

Greg felt the sudden, crushing weight of gravity. He caught at the safety webbing until the pressure stabilized. From that point — if he remembered his early flights accurately — it would be six minutes before the ship reached the satellite. He had won. Nothing could stop him — nothing.

Then Holly Wilson screamed and Greg saw the twelve year old boy standing beside the flight console.

"It wasn't a virus invasion," the child said, shouting to be heard above the roar of the power tubes. "I didn't know you were thinking that this morning. I could have explained if —"

Greg swung his fist — against an emptiness. The boy rematerialized two feet away.

"Reset your course!" the boy cried. "You understand machines, Captain; we don't. And I can't get enough technical information from your mind to do it for you."

"One two, buckle my shoe!" Greg thought, in an ecstasy of triumph. He had kept that much of his thinking safe. The kids were making one last effort to save themselves — he was sure of that — but it wouldn't work. They had the alien skill to pry into a human mind, but they were helpless against man's machines. Inexora-

bly the computer would drive the ship to the satellite; nothing could stop it.

"Think rationally," the boy pleaded, "not with your emotions. You have only four minutes left, Captain Greg. If the Redearth was a virus invasion as you believe it was, why were only the children affected? We made it an antibiotic; we used it for millions of people; every colonist was inoculated before he emigrated."

He was lying. He had to be lying. He was trying to confuse Greg with side ' issues. It didn't matter now how the virus had been brought back to the earth. "Three four, open the door; five six, pick up sticks."

"We aren't different, Captain. We've simply crossed your frontier in a different way. We have a theory how it happened, but no proof. The Martian Redearth worked as a sort of mental catalyst when it was used for newly born infants. It awoke the full thought potential of our cerebral cortex. That's all. We have no ability that men haven't always been capable of; if you believe that, you can do it yourself."

Belief! — mystical nonsense. Did the kid really think Greg would buy that? Greg glanced at Adrian Vaile. The scientist's face was gray with horror. Sweat stood in beads on his lips. Holly Wilson

clung desperately to his hand.

"I drew a wheel in the sand for you, Captain: another monument to another pioneer, the first primitive who grasped what we might do with a rolling disk. He gave us terror and disaster, yes; but he gave us progress, too. Do we blame him because his heirs sometimes misapplied his discovery? Do we call ourselves alien invaders because we have a more complex technology than his? Then why heap shame on yourself because you gave us a frontier in the stars? It won't end the way you thought it would; nothing ever does. We're your children, Captain; we're your new frontier."

"Aliens!" Greg spat.

"My research was for nothing," Dr. Vaile said numbly. The words were a whisper of agony, the torment of a soul ripped out of the comfortable world of madness.

"Don't say that. You'll finish your work," Holly told him soothingly.

He pushed her away. "Not now. It was pointless."

The boy wrung his hands. "You have only two minutes left. Forget your emotions; put aside your self-pity. It's a luxury you can't afford any longer. Use the brains God gave you, Captain Greg. You can't land on the satellite. You must —"

GREG swung again and again he missed the boy, but he lost his balance and plunged into the pilot computer, smashing the machine. Greg saw what he had done and began to laugh. It was impossible, now, for anyone to change the course setting. The boy's pleading was for nothing.

The twelve year old rematerialized and stood looking at the broken computer. Then shrugged his shoulders calmly. "A minute and a half left, Captain; and now you have no choice." The child sighed, as a parent might have sighed over the prank of a mischievous son.

"You killed the mad dog," he said. "You didn't hesitate about that. I thought him into Port City to give you an object lesson. You missed the point, I'm afraid. You couldn't understand that you were yourself a mad dog yapping at our heels. Potentially, all the older generation threaten us the same way. Your kind of emotional reasoning, in one form or another, will sooner or later infect them all. We encouraged the migration to the colonies in order to prevent a conflict. By administering the Red-earth to every adult who left the earth, we thought we might make a few of them realize their mental capacity. Apparently the catalyst works only with an infant, and not always then. In a sense, Captain

Greg, your frontier has made us two species — ours, mankind; yours, the rejects; the unfinished men."

Dr. Vayle made a choking sound deep in his throat. His dream was gone; the comfort of his madness had been stripped away from him.

"And if it does come to the point of conflict," the boy went on quietly, "we fully intend to survive."

"Not after I reach the satellite," Greg answered grimly. His voice sounded hollow and uncertain, even to himself. The boy had destroyed the dramatic fiction of a virus invasion. Greg's dream, too, was gone.

"I tried to save you, Captain, but by your own violence you made that impossible. Now you will provide another object lesson. What I have told you is true; every man has our ability. In sixty seconds your ship will reach the old satellite; the air lock will open automatically — only there will be no air in the wheel. This shell rusted open years ago. You face death just as certain as if you leaped into outer space. But you can save yourselves — all three of you — by thinking yourselves back to the earth, or out to one of the colonies. This experiment interests us a great deal. We didn't intend to resort to it quite

so soon, but you've given us an ideal opportunity. If you can unshackle your minds now, we have hope for the rest of the rejects. There will be fewer mad dogs for us to dispose of later on."

The boy was gone.

Greg felt the ship slide into the ramp of the satellite. He heard the grapples clang against the hull, and the scream of rusting metal as the airlock began to open. A paralyzing emotional opiate flamed through his mind: this was a dream, nothing more. In a moment he would jerk himself awake and be amused by his terror. But there was something else in his mind, too, a stirring of greatness, a fire of magnificence, a new self he had never known before. He groped blindly toward that pinpoint of light.

From a great distance, like an echo of shattering ice, he heard Adrian Vayle's voice, "The children have mastered the art of hypnotic illusion, but obviously they cannot violate the established physical laws. Our problem is entirely mechanical. I am sure Captain Greg can work out . . ."

Vayle had found the sublime ignorance of sanity; and that was no

solution.

"Kiss me," Holly Wilson whispered. "Nothing else matters, Adrian."

And she had chosen the equally blind sterility of resignation.

Greg knew they were both wrong. He was a realist; a spaceman had to be. The kid had been able to read his thoughts; naturally the kid could put this weird sense of a new self in Greg's mind. It was only a clever, semantic manipulation of words to keep Greg from using the satellite.

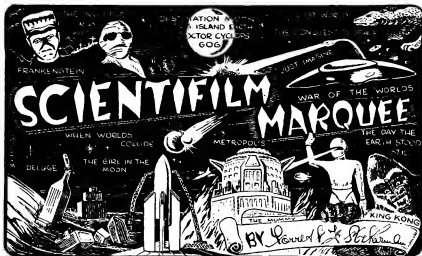
He squared his shoulders. The star-point of greatness flickered out in his mind. Greg was a man, a product of a sophisticated and intelligent culture. This undernourished, alien generation wasn't going to confuse him with mystic mumbo jumbo about belief. He knew how to sort out fact from childish magic.

He walked toward the lock, straight and proud with the confidence of man. He was smiling savagely. Mankind was no mad dog, to be crushed into oblivion by a pack of puny children. They might as well learn that now!

And then the airlock screamed open.

**FOR FREE SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS WITH YOUR
Subscription to IMAGINATION — See Page 130**

— FOR BACK ISSUES YOU MAY HAVE MISSED SEE PAGE 129 —



THE SCI FI film rush is on! With interplanet tales from Venus to Uranus spelling uranium at the box office, *millions* are being expended to capture the public's fancy—and cash. There'll be the usual quota of stinkers that aficionados wouldn't want to see on a pass or touch with a 10 foot pole, but Author Anderson (he of "Brain Wave" fame, and many another) has grown to a 10 foot Poul with the tremendous shooting script he's turned in on **BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE**. In collaboration with Rickert van Halpsiegel, a producer who was a fan when Gernsback was in flower, Anderson has produced a giant 230 page script which, at a conservative estimate, will cost \$10,000 per page to bring to the screen in the near future.

It's that BIG.

It's the "old" Hamilton and Wil-

liamson space spectacle brought up to date (or did we have Russian villains in those days too?).

Action on the U. S. Artificial Satellite is but a prelude to a trip to Mars, which in turn is mere scene setting for the Big Jump clean outside the solar system and 600 *light years* into the infinite depths of Interstellar space!

To the Dark Nebula of Orion!

And there, **UNDER THE DOUBLE STAR** (which may serve as an alternate title for the first modern film with stellar scope), incredible discoveries await intrepid crews of Americans vs Soviets. It's Uskies or the Russkies as a red-violet dwarf star and a greater green-blue ball hang in opposite corners of an alien sky, and pervading the atmosphere is the uneasy, queasy feeling that Other Eyes—are Watching!

Watch for further developments

on **BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE!**

* * *

And even as I type, Paul Blaisdell, whose covers have been seen on the s.f. magazines of Germany, Sweden and America, and who soon may have a cover on *Imagination*, this great artist, now living in Hollywood, is essaying the role of Frankenstein: he is creating a monster. It's a shocking brain-eater that comes from outer space to ravage the human race. I have been asked to title the film, which is being shot in secret. Blaisdell will also paint the posters you'll eventually see under the marquee, before moving on to the \$2,500,000 **HIDDEN UNIVERSE**.

MGM, which has done such fine scientifilms in the past as *Dr. Jekyll & Mr. Hyde*, *Men Must Fight*, *Turn Back the Clock* and *The Mysterious Island* (starring the late Lionel Barrymore, in color), is now pulling all stops out on **FORBIDDEN PLANET**, a flight-to-Jupiter futurama that is getting the old "secret set" treatment. Pitch is that so many new and startling special effects will be introduced in the picture that entrance to all sound stages must be barred to all but classified personnel in order to avoid premature exposure of the settings and effects. Never mind, one of my private eyes will relay me information for your eager ears. More of heroine Anne Francis, for instance, will be revealed in this picture than in any of her preceding performances: she'll be butchered right down to the bone! (This last happened to Peter Lorre at MGM in the great horror scientifilm with the late Colin

Clive, *Mad Love*, based on the famous novel, "The Hands of Orlac". I would very strongly like to see a re-issue of this. How about it, Leo? A good coupling feature would be *Mark of the Vampire*, with Bela Lugosi, Lionel Barrymore and Jean Hersholt.)

On the lighter side, UPA fans—and they seem to be legion—will delight in knowing that the 4th McBoing-Boing cartoon will concern *Gerald on the Planet Moo*.

20th-Fox is reported dickering for theatrical release of the sensational H-bomb episode of TV's "Medic" called *Flash of Darkness* . . . Ray Bradbury has been signed by CBS-TV to do an original tele-script for a future "Climax!" It will be an adaptation of his own off-published slick sci-fi yarn of a time traveling couple in flight from a detective of the future . . . Interrupted shooting on *Bride of the Atom*, Bela Lugosi starrer, has been resumed at Centaur Studios . . . Curt (Donovan's Brain) Siodmak has scripted *Man with the Atom Brain* and *Attack of the Flying Saucers*. Busy man, he's just completed a TV-pilot of his own character-series, *Captain Fathom*, about a modern day Capt. Nemo, an independently wealthy undersea adventurer who constructs his own atom-powered sub to roam the international waters in search of excitement. Siodmak is being mentioned as possible director of **BEYOND THE BARRIERS OF SPACE** in the same breath with William Cameron Menzies, colossal creator of the classic *THINGS TO COME*, as Art Director, with Paul Blaisdell as assistant and myself as Technical Advisor.

Picture titlers must have brains on the brain lately, as there's a *Brain Machine* scheduled for importation from England, which is also sending us a *Devil-Girl from Mars* and a romance about a lady from Venus, title of which I have unfortunately misplaced my note on. Or maybe it's a man from Venus. "Suitor from Venus"—something like that.

ANIMAL titles, too, are zoo-ming, with *Animal Farm* (Geo. Orwell), *The Men Fish*, *Tarantula*, *Francis Joins the Navy*, and a talking dog yarn scheduled for MGM. Come to think of it, fish and tarantulas aren't exactly animals, but you get the idea. We also have a *Beast from Hollow Mountain*, *King Dinosaur*, *Gojilla* (Japanese) and *It Came from Beneath the Sea*. In the latter, Stefan Ray Harryhausen, now recognized as Hollywood master effects man, animates an octopus with thousand foot long tentacles that pulls down the Golden Gate bridge and rolls up San Francisco's Market Street, razing buildings and jellifying pedestrians. Harryhausen is interested in animating Curt Siodmak's "Eggs from Lake Tanganyika", is currently activating prehistoric monsters at Warner Bros. for *The Animal World*. Interesting side-lite: in France the giant sci-ants' fiction film, *THEM!* was retitled *When the Monsters Came to the City* (translation courtesy my trilingual s. f. fanne wife). The French have a picture up their sleeves, *Saucer: Destination Venus*.

Telefilmwise, the first in the projected Canterbury Science Fiction Series has been completed:

Rick Strauss' *Destination Orbit*, employing the Dual-9 process. A big-time space battle is the hi-lite of the picture, which was recently privately projected for me and Curt Siodmak, Edward Spiegel, Martin Varno and several others. We see colonials of the Free Planets in pyrotechnic rebellion against the forces of the Solar Federation, as the screen blazes with slashing rays and exploding rockets in the space-honored tradition of Ray Cummings and "Skylark" Smith. In the end of this melodrama Earth boy gets Venus girl, but not before the enemies-in-love are nearly toasted on an asteroid built for two that orbits too near Old Sol.

John Flory is revising the script on Ron Hubbard's Ole Doc Methuselah episode, *Plague*, which he intends to produce, and producer-director Vincent Sherman is reading Hubbard's Top Ten classic, *FINAL BLACKOUT*. Sherman has also been giving his attention to van Vogt's *SLAN* and Chad Oliver's *SHADOWS IN THE SUN*.

Frank Quattrocchi has turned his own original story, "Plant Inspection", into a screen treatment, *Venus Philanderer* . . . Gordon Dewey & Simon Matrii have come up with an original film-plot, *The Earth Watchers*; Dewey & van Vogt have prepared *Project Spaceship*; and Dewey has done something for Fritz (Metropolis) Lang with a touch of s. f. in it . . . *The Day the Earth Ended* is a James Nicholson title in search of a plot . . . Wyoff Ordnung is in search of an imaginative backer with the right kind of cash to bring off his space-time travel package, *HELL IN THE HEAVENS*, on which I've

done an additional dialog stint (in the scientific areas) and been signed as Technical Advisor . . .

If you want to get exercised as I did, run do not walk to the nearest showing of *The Witch Returns to Life*. This is a film in the Finnish language by Mike Waltari of "The Egyptian" fame. Unfortunately, it is not a good film, either artistically or fantastically (it *does* concern the revivification in modern Finland of a young and uninhibited witch-girl who was put to death with a stake thru her heart 300 years before) but what you will see is, to my taste (and the SRO audience in which I saw it previewed in Hollywood), the most hysterically ridiculous job of censorsnipping I've ever seen. If this masterpiece of mayhem survives to the 21st century, surely our more enlightened descendants will die laughing at Madame Grundy's heavy hand,

which in this case *scraped* every evidence of femininity, *frame by frame*, off the female form whenever revealed unclad! Fantastic visual end product of this "masking" process (the Masker even got a screen credit, to his eternal shame): electrical butterflies or vitons luminescently fluttering and fluttering in front of the "vital" spots! For such an occasion as this I think Bill Shakespeare coined his immortal cliché, "Out, damned spots!"

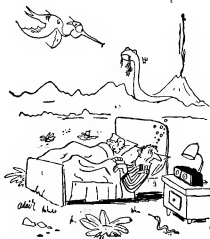
Eleventh Hour Flashes:

Arthur C. Clarke's 9 *Billion Names of God* bought by Hollywood!

Cinema sale for Richard Matheson in the wind: *Shipshape Home!*

Walter Wanger to produce Jack Finney's hair-raising new sci-fi suspense, the pocketbook hit **THE BODY SNATCHERS!**

—Forrest J. Ackerman



"Dear, are you sure this is just a clock radio?"

No Gun To The Victor

by

Theodore R. Cogswell

Competitive sport is a healthy program for any youth; Alan's participation in the games was competitive — but healthy only if he survived! . . .

CONSUMER (KON-SUM-ER), *n.*, 1. a person who destroys, uses up, or wastes industrial production in order to control the size of the population and make possible the full employment that is necessary for a healthy economy. 2. one who has not yet achieved producer status. 3. Any person under twenty-one. 4. (Obs.) A person who uses goods or services to satisfy his needs rather than to resell them or to produce other goods with them.

—*The Authorized Dictionary (New Washington, Kansas: The Federal Printing Office, 3rd ed., 1944)*

IT was Saturday so Alan had to go out and get the mail. Just as the letter carrier's tank clanked away, he got his cousin Alf to man the front door turret and went zigzagging down the communication trench that led to the street.

As he reached cautiously up to open the small door in the bottom of the armored mail box, there was a sudden crack from across the way and the whine of a near miss sent him tumbling back into the slit trench. A moment later there was a coughing stutter as Alf opened up with the fifty and pounded a burst into the tungsten steel shutters of the house across the street. Alan jumped to his feet, dumped the mail out of the box, and then made a quick dive for safety just in case Alf's fire hadn't completely discouraged the Higgins kid.

The mail didn't look particularly exciting. There wasn't anything for him, and aside from a few letters for his uncle, most of what had come consisted of advertisements for sniper-scopes and stuff like that. The only exceptions were two small black boxes. They looked like



samples of something, and since, as the only consumer left in the family, samples were Alan's perquisite, he promptly stuffed them into his worn grenade carrier, and just as promptly forgot about them. Until that evening when the man from Consolidated Munitions stopped by, that is.

MR. Flugnet was so disturbed that he'd forgotten to take off his white truce hat. "We think the promotion crew passed out a batch on this street," he said as Alan slipped into the room and sat down quietly in the far corner. "But we're not sure."

"Why not?" asked Alan's uncle,

a weedy little man with a somewhat nasal voice.

"Because some damn kid dropped a mortar shell on their half-track while they were on the way back to the warehouse to pick up another load. Got every one of them. Were any samples dropped off here?"

"Alan brought in the mail," volunteered Alf.

"Was there anything in it that somebody wanted that they didn't get?" asked Alan in a small voice. They all turned and looked at him, aware of his presence for the first time.

"I'm from Consolidated Munitions," said Mr. Flugnet.

"Yes, sir.?"

"Did you find a small black box in the mail? We've been passing out samples of our new concussion grenade and we just discovered today that several . . . uh . . . overpowered experimental models had got mixed in with them by mistake. We're trying to track them down before it's—well, before something unfortunate happens."

Alan was just about to reach into his grenade case and produce the two little cartons when the word "overpowered" registered. He struggled briefly against temptation and lost.

"I dumped all the advertising stuff on the hall table." He felt suddenly that his grenade case had become transparent and that the little black boxes inside, now grown to quadruple size, were visible to everybody in the room. He knew it couldn't be, but even so he let his hand drop casually over the carrier just in case there might be a revealing bulge. "I'll go check."

Once the door was safely shut behind him, he took the two boxes out, opened them, and examined their contents. There was a little metallic globe in each, but one had a roughly soldered seam that made it look like a hand production job. He gave a little whistle of excitement and stowed it away careful-

ly in his pocket. If he was going to make it through the game with North, he was going to need super power. After replacing the other grenade in his box and putting it back in his carrier, he squatted down on his haunches and listened at the keyhole. He wanted to find out something more about his new weapon.

"Fine young consumer, that," he heard Mr. Flugnet say in the voice that producers use when they want to say something nice that they really don't mean. Aunt Martha let out a long sniff.

"Too spindly! It's a wonder to us that he's made it this far. He just hasn't got the stuff that my boys have. Made it through, both of them, with hardly a scratch."

She nodded fondly over toward Reuban and Alf. Alf was sniggering through a comic book one of the new improved kind without any words to distract the reader. Reuban just sat a thin dribble of saliva drooling from one corner of his mouth, and plucked aimlessly at the buttons on his shirt. As they looked at him, he began to squirm back and forth and to make little whimpering sounds.

"Better take Reuban upstairs before he dirties himself again," said Aunt Martha. Alf obediently took his younger brother by the arm and herded him out of the

room. Alan ducked under the hall table until they had gone by.

"Which shock is he on? asked Mr. Flugnet politely.

"He got his third today. That's always the worst."

Mr. Flugnet nodded his agreement.

"Another couple of weeks, though, and he'll be ready to start his reconditioning. And by spring he'll be ready to settle down as a full-fledged producer and start raising little consumption units of his own," he sighed. "I do wish they'd work out a faster method. For three weeks now I've had to take care of him just like I would a baby. It's no easy job for a woman of my age."

Alan's uncle clucked impatiently. "We all had to go through it once—and somebody had to take care of us. It's never pretty, but it's just the way things are."

ALAN was just about to give up and go back in the room when he heard his uncle say, "This new grenade you have in production, it's something special?"

"It was supposed to be," said the visitor unhappily. "We figured it would be the hottest consumers item to hit the market in years."

"What do you mean, 'supposed to be'? Did some bugs show up after you got it into production?"

Mr. Flugnet shook his head. "There's nothing wrong with the grenade itself. It'll knock out anything within a radius of ten feet and not even bother anybody standing just the other side of the blast area. We thought we had the perfect consumer item. No flying fragments to bother innocent producers, no danger of misfire. New Washington was so impressed that they gave us a heavy enough subsidy to make it possible for us to put three man hours in each one and still retail them for \$4.27 a gross. And then . . ."

"Yes?" Alan's uncle leaned forward eagerly in his chair.

For some reason or other, Mr. Flugnet changed the subject hurriedly. "What line are you in?"

"Small arms. But getting to those experimental models you're looking for . . ."

Mr. Flugnet wasn't about to get back. "How's production?" he asked.

Unwillingly, Alan's uncle moved off in the new direction. "Not bad, considering. We're always the last to feel the pinch. Things are still tighter than I like, though. Shirey down the street got laid off at the burp gun plant last week and he doesn't know when he'll be taken back. I don't see why the government doesn't shorten the truce periods so as to give the kids more

consuming time."

"It's not that simple," said Mr. Flugnet pontifically. "If you increase consumption much over what it is now, you'll decrease the number of consumers too fast. That causes overproduction, and pretty soon more factories start shutting down. Then bingo! we've got ourselves a fine recession."

"I hadn't thought about it that way," said Alan's uncle slowly. "And after all, things aren't too bad. Even if some of the arms plants do have to shut down once in a while, most of the producers do have jobs most of the time. And we are able to keep the population down to the point where the land that escaped dusting during the big war can produce enough food for everybody."

One of Alan's feet was going to sleep and the conversation didn't make much sense to him, so he decided that now was as good a time to make his entrance as any.

"I found it," he said, holding out the second sample.

"Took you long enough," grumbled his uncle. Mr. Flugnet didn't say anything, he just came over and took the box from Alan. Dumping the sphere that was inside out into the palm of his hand, he examined it closely.

"No soap," he said wearily and handed it back. "That's one of the

regulars. Here, you can keep it."

"Thanks." Alan placed the little grenade carefully in his carrier. "I'll need this tonight. We're playing North and every little bit will help. Coach Blauman says that even if we haven't much in the way of equipment, it's the spirit that counts. He says that if we really get in there and fight we'll be able to stop North cold."

"That's nice," murmured Mr. Flugnet vaguely as he reached for his hat. He obviously had his mind on other things.

"Sorry the boy didn't have what you were looking for," said Alan's uncle. "But probably the other men have rounded up the rest of them by now."

MR. Flugnet looked dubious. "I doubt it. Kids are like packrats. When Security finally broke Harris down—he's the guy that's responsible for this whole mess—he admitted to having made at least three hundred and slipping them into sample cases. As of an hour ago we'd recovered exactly thirty-seven."

He caught himself with a start. "Shouldn't be talking about it. Though I can't see where it makes any difference now." He let out a long sigh. "Well, you're the last house on my list and I've done all that I can. Guess I'd better be go-

ing." He picked up his truce hat and planted it firmly on his head.

"Guess I'd better be going too," said Alan. "I've got to be getting over to the stadium to get dressed for the game."

"Don't rush off," said Alan's uncle. He didn't intend to let the visitor escape until he found out exactly what it was that was causing him so much concern. "No, not you, Alan. You run on. I'm talking to Mr. Flugnet. Why not wait until the cease-fire siren sounds? It's getting dark outside and some of the kids might take a potshot at you before they see your truce hat."

"Thanks just the same, but—"

"Aw, stay! I'll fix you a good stiff drink. You look as though you could use one."

Mr. Flugnet hesitated and then sat down again. "I guess I could at that," he said.

Alan's uncle hurried over to the liquor cabinet and poured two long ones. After he'd handed a drink to Mr. Flugnet, he settled back in his own chair and said as casually as he could, "You were saying something about somebody named Harris who did something to some grenades and got hauled in by Security?"

Mr. Flugnet didn't answer right away. Instead he took a long pull at his glass, coughed, and then

took another. Alan looked at his watch and then started out of the room. He was almost to the door when his aunt said sharply, "Alan!"

He turned.

"If you get hit tonight, mind that you see that they do a proper job of patching you up at the aid station. I don't want my sheets all messed up like last time."

"Yes, ma'am," Alan said obediently. As he went out nobody said goodbye. They were all waiting for Mr. Flugnet to say something.

Alan stopped automatically at the front door and made a quick check of the street through the periscope. Nothing seemed to be moving but he didn't take any chances. Sliding the door open just wide enough to get through, he made a running dive for the communication trench. The kid across the street had got a sniper-scope for Christmas and a guy wasn't even safe after dark.

THE field lights were already on and the stadium a quarter full when Alan slipped into the locker room. He was ten minutes late and had to hurry with his dressing, but for once the coach didn't bawl him out. Coach Blauman didn't even notice him—Coach Blauman had troubles of his own. He was over in one corner telling them to Dan Ericson, the

sports reporter for the *Tribune* who covered most of the high school events.

The coach was a fat, florid man, and there was a slight thickness to his speech that indicated that he had gotten to the bottle he kept in the back of his locker earlier than usual.

"You want a quote?" he snorted. "I'll give you a quote. I'll give you enough quotes to fill that whole damn fish-wrapper you call a magazine from front to back. You can put my picture on page one and put a great big *Coach Blauman* says right underneath it."

Ericson gave a tired grin. "Go ahead, coach. What's the beef for the evening?"

"That damn PTA, that's what. I go to them and ask for four mortars, four stinking mortars, and all I get is the brush-off. Three thousand bucks they got salted away, and it's all going for new body armor for the band. I say, 'What's the use of having a pretty band when the team's so hard up for equipment that a bunch of sand lot grade school players could knock them over.' So old Stevens gives me the fish eye and throws me a line about how it ain't whether you win or lose but how you play the game."

"Don't let it get you down, Blauman," said the reporter. "Think

of all the character you're building!"

ALAN was lugged off the field at the end of the second action with a gash in his head that took six stitches to close. During the rest of the quarter he sat woodenly on the bench in the players dugout. A telescreen at the far end was following the play but he didn't lift his head to look at it. He looked like a clockwork manikin that had been temporarily turned off.

He was sent back in just before the end of the half. Illegally, it is true—the enemy had already received credit for one wounded, and according to NAA rules he was supposed to be ineligible to continue playing. Blauman didn't have any choice, however. The last drive of North's had torn up his whole center and he didn't have much left in the way of reserves.

As Alan trotted out toward the foxholes that marked his side's last stand, he passed stretcher bearers bringing back the dead and injured from the last play. Most of them were wearing the green helmets of Marshall. The PA system announced the substitution and there was a feeble cheer from the Marshall side of the stadium.

Alan went up to the referee's tank and threw a quick salute at

the vision slit.

"Wetzel substituting for Mitchell."

"Check," said the bored voice of the official inside. "Fight clean and fight hard and may the best team win." The formula came mechanically. Neither the referee nor anybody else had any doubt that the best team had won.

Alan was half way to the hastily dug trenches that marked his team's position when a mortar shell exploded forty feet away and knocked him off his feet. There was a sudden outraged blast from the referee's siren, and then the enemy captain bobbed out of his foxhole.

"Sorry, sir," he yelled. "One of my mortar crews was sighting in and accidentally let off a round."

The referee wasn't impressed.

"That'll cost you exactly twenty yards," he said.

A yell came from the Marshall bleachers as the penalty for backfield illegally in motion was announced. The Marshall team was too tired to do any cheering. They just trudged forward and planted themselves in the defensive line they had been thrown out of five minutes before.

The North team was more careful this time. There wasn't a quiver of motion from their side until the referee's siren signaled the beginning of play. Then they opened

up with everything they had. It seemed to Alan that every mortar North owned was zeroed in on his position and that every one of their grenade men was out to get him personally. Blast followed blast in such steady succession that the night air seemed one solid mass of jagged shrapnel. He'd had it bad before, but nothing like this. He flattened against the moist earth of his fox hole and waited numbly for the knife edges to rip him open. Then suddenly it stopped and without thinking he found himself rising into a defensive position. There was a savage spatter of victory yells from the other line and then they came swarming out of their positions, their bayonets gleaming wickedly in the overhead lights.

They were repeating the play that they had been using all evening, a hard punching thrust through center. The guidon bearer came charging forward, his tommy gunners fanned out in front of him in a protecting screen, their guns hosing the Marshall positions with quick accurate bursts.

Alan forced himself to lift his head enough to sight accurately, and opened up on the flag bearer. He was a difficult target as he came dancing forward, bobbing and shifting at every step. Alan fired methodically, remembering not to

jerk his trigger finger as he squeezed off his shots. And then his gun jammed. He got a moment's breathing spell as Marshall's two surviving mortars opened up to give him some covering fire, but the Northers didn't stop altogether, they kept coming in short rushes.

Alan was singled out for their special attention. With him knocked out they could carry their flag right through the center of Marshall's line. With a sudden yell, four of them threw themselves into a crouching run and came charging down on his position. Alan hammered at the clearing lever of his rifle but it was stuck fast. Throwing it angrily off to one side, he tore open the cover of his grenade case and fumbled inside until his fingers closed around the sphere with the roughly soldered edge. He waited until the Northers were almost on him and then threw it at the middle man as hard as he could.

There was a blast. A blast of harsh purple light that punched through the protecting ramparts of his foxhole as if they weren't there. He felt a sudden wave of nausea, and then a stabbing tearing pain inside the back of his head as old neural channels were ripped out and new ones opened up. When he finally staggered to

his feet he looked the same. Outside that is. Inside he wasn't the same sort of a human any longer. Neither was any other consumer in the stadium.

WHEN Alan got back to the house, everybody was still in the living room. Mr. Flugnet was somewhat drunk and all the pressure that had been built up inside him was hissing out in speech. Alan stood silently in the doorway and listened.

" . . . and then it was too late," said Mr. Flugnet. "Somebody must have slipped up in shock therapy or else something went haywire with the reconditioning machinery. Whatever it was, Harris came out with the job only half done. He waited ten years for a chance to strike back for what had been done to him while he was still a consumer. When he was put to work on the development of the new concussion grenade, he had his chance and he made the most of it."

"How?"

"He worked out a deconditioner that was so tiny it would fit into a grenade case and so powerful that it could blanket an area half a mile across."

"Deconditioner?" said Alan's uncle in a puzzled voice.

"You went through one while

you were being changed. The old patterns have to be taken out before new ones can be put in."

"All that I remember is sitting in a long room with a silver helmet on my head that had a lot of wires attached to it. But I still don't understand about that Harris fellow."

"It's simple enough. He came out remembering."

"Remembering what?"

"Remembering what it was like to be a consumer," said Mr. Flugnet grimly.

"But everybody remembers that."

Mr. Flugnet shook his head. "You just think you do. Part of the reconditioning process is the introduction of a protective amnesia. Being a consumer isn't nice, isn't nice at all. The post natal blocks only operate on the conscious level. Underneath a tremendous pressure of anger and hatred and fear is built up over the years. The consumer pattern that has been conditioned in runs directly contrary to the instinct for self preservation, or whatever you want to call it. That's why the change to producer status takes so long. The accumulated charge has to be drained off slowly before the reconditioning can take place. But if the blocks were to be removed at once, if the youngsters were to

suddenly wake up and see their world as it actually is . . ." Mr. Flugnet's voice shuddered to a stop. "Do you mind if I have another drink? Just a short one?" Without waiting for an answer he went and helped himself. "Maybe they'd understand," he muttered.

"Understand what?" said Alan's uncle blankly. "Who?"

"The consumers. Maybe they'd understand that there wasn't any other way to do it. The factories produce so fast that when everybody has all they want, they have to shut down—except the war plants, that is. That gets used up as fast as it's made. But when there was nobody left to fight, when everybody else was dead, we had to keep producing. And if you produce, somebody has to consume. And . . ." His voice trailed off.

"I still don't see what you're so upset about," said Alan's uncle.

Alan stepped into the room. "I do," he said in a strange flat voice.

Mr. Flugnet took one good look at him, made a funny little squawking sound, and huddled back in his chair.

"I almost got killed tonight," said Alan.

His uncle shot him a surprised look. "That's a funny remark for a consumer to make."

"Yeah," said Alan. "I guess it is."

"Well, forget about it, If you've got what it takes, you'll make it through like Alf and Reuban did. If you haven't—well, that's just the way things are."

"And that's the way things should be," announced Alf. "Only the strong deserve the jobs. By the way, what happened to the celebration? We used to tear the town up after games."

"We're having it tomorrow."

"You are not!" snapped his uncle indignantly. "Tomorrow's Sunday. You kids have the streets to yourself three days a week as it is. If you think you're going to be allowed to throw lead around while your elders are on their way to church, you've got another think coming!"

"I don't think the producers will mind," said Alan softly. He made a quick mental calculation and took one step backwards. When his hand came out of his worn grenade case, it wasn't empty.

There has been two little black boxes.

MR. Flugnet had been right, the new concussion grenade

did have a beautifully defined blast area. Aside from a slight ringing in his ears, Alan felt fine as he walked out of the house. For the first time in his life during a consumption period, he didn't dive into the communication trench that led to the street. Instead he walked slowly across the lawn. When he got to the sidewalk he sat down on the curb and waited. There was a brief staccato rattle of a burp gun from across the way and a moment later the Higgens kid came out of his house.

"Over here," yelled Alan. "The rest will be along in a minute."

From houses all up and down the street began to come sharp crashing explosions.

"Those new hand grenades are sure something," said the Higgens kid.

"They sure are," said Alan. He sighed comfortably and cupped his chin in his hands. "But tomorrow we'll have to start collecting all the ones that are left over. You leave stuff like that laying around and somebody might get hurt."

THE END

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— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THE TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS

Edited by Harold W. Kuebler, 694 pages, \$2.95, Hanover House, Garden City, New York.

Here is a massive compilation, a ponderous volume of "classic" science-fiction. Edgar Allen Poe, Wells, Balmer & Wylie, Doyle, Verne, Stapledon, Forster, Capek, Huxley, Serviss, Fitzgerald, Wright, Bierce and Priestley make up the roster of authors. The stories range from Wells' "The Star" through Verne's "Journey Around the Moon," to excerpts from Huxley's "Brave New World." This latter, by the way, is the best thing in the book.

Some of Stapledon's material also is interesting; for example his "The Last Terrestrials" from the "Last

and First Men."

In spite of the fact that this book offers a representative selection of some good—and bad—early science fiction, I can quite conceive of why one should not buy it. Most of the selections, even Stapledon's works, are easily available in libraries and bookstores. With the exception of "Brave New World" and perhaps "Time Machine" none of the stories—by today's standards—are particularly captivating.

To round out a science fiction library, a volume like this could be justified as a "sampler" of early s-f. I can think of no other reason for buying it save that it's a bargain in sheer paper-bulk!



Conducted by Mari Wolf

HAVE you been reading fanzine fiction about rockets lately? If not, you've been missing something.

Take the meteorite plot for example. You're in a spaceship, en-route to Jupiter or maybe Alpha Centauri, when wham, a meteor the size of a baseball whizzes through the cabin, perhaps ruining a critical instrument or two, and exits through the other side of the hull. Your problem: to stay alive.

Now, maybe the spaceship crews will encounter meteorites the size of baseballs. Occasionally. Given enough spaceships and perhaps trips into such meteor-crowded places as the asteroid belt, you'll have opening situations just like the ones in the fanzine stories. (The odds are that normally you'd go years and years without encountering a meteorite as large as a grain of sand; still, given enough ships,

some of them are bound to be at the wrong end of the probability curve.)

What happens? In the hypothetical situation a la fanzine, the answer is quite simple. You're just one of the unfortunate statistics also at the wrong end of the probability curve.

Okay, so you have meteor screens. And screens against cosmic radiation. (Why aren't cosmic rays used as a menace in fiction more often? Because their effects aren't as tangible as those of a material hunk of meteorite? Or because the author can't think of a sufficiently convincing, but dramatic defense? Probably the latter; if you're blinded or sterilized by a cosmic ray, all the gimmicks of modern technology can be pretty worthless as remedies.)

Still, the meteor plot is a mild example of fanzine fiction. There

are meteorites, after all, and a spaceship once hit obviously wouldn't fare too well.

But the fanzine authors can invent other hazards. (The movies can invent the greatest hazards of all, such as missing the Moon and hitting Mars, but this is another story.) The fanzine story can have the rocket incapable of being handled because of its high velocity; (though neither you nor your ship will feel velocity, only acceleration or change in velocity. You and everything else are going around the sun at 18.5 miles a second, on the average, and do you feel rushed?)

The fanzine story abounds in weird fuels, ways of circumventing Newton, not to mention Einstein, and vehicles which were pretty old-fashioned before the V-2 was off the drawing board. Never mind. The important thing isn't that the amateur writer is wrong on details; he's still right in general. The future will probably be full of rockets and rockets will have their problems, both mechanical and human.

You're a science fiction fan. Your reading is partly an escape and partly sheer entertainment; it tells a good story and is fascinating in itself. Still, there's something more. Underneath, if you keep reading science fiction, you can't help but believe in some of its basic ideas: change, scientific progress, maybe even a society where right makes might and not the other way around.

So you're a science fiction fan. So you believe in an age of rockets, of man's conquest of the solar system, and perhaps, of the galaxy as

well.

How do you, personally, intend to act on your beliefs?

You have a number of choices open to you. You can do nothing at all. You can read about the future, and enjoy what you read; and if, in your lifetime, any of the stories you read come remotely true you can sit back smugly with an "I told you so, didn't I?" expression on your face and a feeling of superiority toward the average man. This, perhaps, is the most common attitude.

You can start reading science fiction young, and become fired up over the prospects of what you read about, and decide to dedicate your life to the science behind the stories. You can do so: as you mature you can forget or almost forget the stories that were your original impetus; you can plunge into research for the sake of research and prestige among others like yourself; you can end as an innovator who has forgotten, or repressed, the wild dreams that started you on the road to innovation.

You can do a lot of other things. You can decide the world is against you and join some group that alone has the knowledge of the truth, be it a flying saucer group, an older established mystical cult, or anything else.

Or you can just go on being yourself, committed to whatever personal goals you were committed to before you read science fiction, with your own personal ideas of the future still meaningful inside of you and wanting expression, but without your knocking yourself out to realize them in your own lifetime.

If you look at the average membership of an amateur rocket group you'll find the out and out idealists in a minority. You'll find that people believe in space travel, sure, but the emphasis is different. You won't find the "I'm persecuted and the security board is trying to run me out of existence" fanatic; you won't find the "Big business is against me and I daren't try to patent anything I find out or they'll rob me" fanatic; you won't even find many of the slide rule for slide rule's sake, "science is everything and who cares about its application?" boys.

You'll find, all in all, a pretty normal group of people who like to build rockets, work out improvements for existing designs, and get a great deal of pleasure out of firing their own creations a half mile to five miles up in the desert skies.

Nobody's persecuting them. They know the Army can build better rockets, and better guidance systems, and better telemetering equipment. So what? Maybe they work for the Army forty hours a week. This isn't important. What is important is that they're improving their own product, that this year's rocket is better than last year's, that a specific problem—parachute release mechanism, radio transmitter, fuel injector or what have you—has been solved or at least partially solved.

Your amateur rocket club isn't competing with the government. It's not the hope of the world, and it doesn't think that it is. Its members are out to improve their own personal knowledge of the field of rocketry, their own personal skills. They are limited by lack of money;

the limitation is accepted. They're limited by lack of facilities, by their utter inability to compete in this modern world, on a professional level, with industry and the military services.

So why do they go ahead anyway? It's hard to say. A flying saucer group may persist out of a feeling of conflict, the "Everybody's against me and the Army's ready to hush up anything I say" attitude. It can be a martyr. The amateur rocket group can't. Martyrdom, under present day circumstances, is pretty silly.

Why build rockets then?

Some readers of science fiction who are really serious about rockets solve their problem another way. They go on to become science fiction writers, amateur or professional. They say what they feel they have to say.

Your amateur rocket groups do the same thing. But they don't do it with words. They say what they have to say with the vehicle of their own construction, with the fuels of their own research, with the instrumentation of their own devising.

The countdown ends and the rocket climbs out of the tower against the desert sky. It doesn't matter to its builders that it's nowhere near the size of a government rocket, that it's pretty much of a breadboard rig compared to its industrial cousin; that it sacrifices stability, controlability, and everything else for cheapness and ease of construction. It climbs into the sky, and the amateur rocket builders in their foxholes in the desert take all the pleasure in it that man can take of his created works: it falls to Earth and the Army

rocket climbs past it, contemptuously. Perhaps the same men have worked on both, professional and amateur. The performance of the one doesn't lessen the pride in the other.

Dilettantes? Perhaps. But all with the one dream. Perhaps some amateur, somewhere, sometime, will discover the one thing the professional has overlooked. Perhaps some amateur, sometime, will make the contribution that leads to the stars.

Dreamers? Sure. But practical dreamers. For if the one great amateur doesn't arise, if all the rocket clubs in all the world produce nothing at all of intrinsic value, still their members have lost nothing.

They will have still had the pleasure of creating. They will still have fulfilled themselves, as human beings.

* * *

Now for the fanzines.

PSYCHOTIC: 20c; Dick Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon. Geis normally charges 20c per copy but is willing to send a free copy to anyone who'll drop him a postcard.

This issue has a stand-in editorial; seems that his original editorial was so hot it steamed up the printing company president's glasses. The bit in question is now in Washington waiting for official approval.

The first part of a three-part serial stuffs this issue. It's an S-F Con report by Peter Graham. To give an idea how detailed the report is, he uses 15 pages to go from Thursday afternoon to Friday night. Nothing exciting so far but it seems to be quite accurate. ✓

The high point of this zine is the priceless Kellogg "interior" illustration. And he doesn't even get credit on the contents page!

This is an average issue for Geis . . . which makes it better than 95% of the zines going now.

Rating: 1

* * *

EISFA: 5c; monthly; Robert and Juanita Coulson, 626 Court St., Huntington, Indiana. *Eisfa* is published by the Eastern Indiana Science Fiction Association, a member club of the Stf League of Indiana.

In this issue there's a very funny bit by "Edgar Allen Pogo." It's "The Spaceship Boys on Titan," and manages to cram the Rover Boys and all the other juvenile hero teams together into one youthful foursome up against the perils of a sort of composite science fiction space opera setting. As a satire it stays funny all the way through. (If you're extremely young and impressionable maybe you'll even like it straight.)

There's a story by Hal Annas, who usually turns out very good ones. This one, though, manages to convey a complete lack of knowledge about rocketry—both in how to build a rocket motor and how Newton's laws function up there where there's nothing for the rocket to push against. It would, I fear, have been better as another satire.

Ricky Ertl reports on "Science Fiction in Argentina," a very interesting article on what is a comparatively new field of literature there. He illustrates his article with a rocket bearing all sorts of slogans—including Viva Fangio!

If you judged the fanzines strictly by intrinsic merit, without tak-

ing price into account, and forced your thinnest nickel hecto job to compete with a thirty cent photo offset zine—even under these conditions you'd have to give a pretty good rating to *Eisfa*. It's mimeod very well; it's quite good sized (over 20 pages); it has good material. For its price you can't afford not to get it.

Rating: 3

* * *

PEON: 20c; Charles Lee Riddle, PNCA, USN, 108 Dunham St., Norwich, Conn. *Peon* is now in its eighth year of publication, quite a record considering that Editor Riddle manages to publish his zine from wherever the Navy sends him. By the time you read this he should have started a tour of sea duty; however, he promises that this fanzine will keep coming out approximately every three months no matter where he is.

Peon has, over the years, maintained a consistently high standard. It's a well balanced zine, with articles, both serious and light, and some good fiction.

In this issue Robert Bloch, in his "Pruriency, Anyone?" makes some very apt remarks on why writers write the way they do. You may not agree with all the examples he picks, but how could you argue against the basic thesis? Writers, in general, write what people read (and not what people say they read).

John Magnus brings a new gimmick to the old art of Convention reporting. His "Rooms at the Con" is just that—an account of his progress from room 526, through 1806, 318 and others, with accounts of who was where and what went on.

S. J. Sackett also turns to an essay on writing and the reader's viewpoint in "A Reconstruction of S F Ideas." His definition of what science fiction is today might be a red flag in the face of a lot of people, who would insist to the end on the *science* in science fiction as making the story. Sackett puts the story first, with some good reasons too . . .

Plus Terry Carr, Jim Harmon, and a gimmick-ending time travel story by Dave Mason.

Rating: 4

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; published twice a month; Fandom House, P. O. Box 233, Paterson 23, New Jersey. Edited and published by James V. Taurasi and Ray Van Houten.

Fanzines come and fanzines go, but F-T shows signs of going on forever. In the last several years it really hasn't changed at all—same format, same approximate size, same publishing schedule, same policy. The policy is simple: to bring you the news of the entire science fiction world.

There have been changes in the past few years, but they haven't lasted long. It seems that the readers like the zine just the way it is.

Here you'll keep up with the science fiction, fantasy and weird markets, both US and foreign, magazines, books, movies, TV and radio shows—all media where you'll find fantasy or s-f material. Plus convention reports from all over the world, as well as news about personalities, both fan and pro.

The newspaper of science fiction is just that, and a lot of work has

gone into keeping it what you want it—an efficient and reliable source of information on just about everything science fictional.

Rating: 3

* * *

KAYMAR TRADER: 10c; monthly; Gary Labowitz, 7234 Baltimore, Kansas City 14, Missouri. With this issue the Trader acquires a new editor. But it retains its name, schedule, price and apparently policy as well. It's still the advertising medium where you can list your science fiction and fantasy books for sale, or where you can shop for items to fill out your collection.

Ad rates remain the same: \$1:00 for a full page, 25c for a quarter page, rates which are reasonable indeed. If you're a collector and want to get every issue, subscription rates are 3 for 25c (or 5 for 25c if you're a member of the National Fantasy Fan Federation).

This zine is of interest only if you're buying, selling or swapping s-f or fantasy items; almost all of it is made up of advertisers' lists. If you're a collector, you'll want it.

Rating: 3

* * *

ISFA: 15c; bimonthly; Edward McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis, Ind. The Indiana Science Fiction Association sponsors this zine, which is edited by McNulty and Robert Adair. (Not to be confused with EISFA.)

The issue I have here runs to fiction, with three stories by Edward Nelson, V.A.H. Neitz, and Zachary Davies. Nelson's "Triump" is, to me at least overly

idealistic; the defeat of a dictatorship by a Ghandhi-type individual just doesn't ring true in this context. In time maybe — but the men who're defeated by such an individual would hardly be the type influenced here.

Nietz's "The Walls of Rome" is the atom-war destruction theme again, this time paralleling the people hiding underground from the bombs with the people in the last days of the Roman Empire. Davies' "And Farther Still" seems more mystical than science fictional in treatment, even if based on a racket voyage to the moon.

Robert Coulson's "Some Astounding Changes" is well presented, as is most of his work.

Rating: 5

* * *

IT: 25c; Walter W. Lee, Jr., 1205 South 10th St., Coos Bay, Oregon. The major feature of this issue is Editor Lee's Checklist of Science Fiction and Fantasy Films. He starts with a brief history of the fantasy film, from the 1890's to the present, then plunges into what certainly looks like a really complete listing. Think of any horror, fantasy, science fiction or even vaguely science fictional feature film you've seen or heard about. Undoubtedly you'll find it here, dated and classified. Most are American, though British, French and German films are included. No attempt was made to include all short subjects as well; here, though, many important shorts are listed.

There is also a large section of very brief science fiction stories and poems, with Jim Wilson's "Chrys" being the only one over

a page long. Plus Gordon Woodcock's article on rocket fuels.

Rating: 6

* * *

MAGNITUDE: 10c; quarterly; 409 West Lexington Drive, Glendale 3, Calif. Ralph Stapenhorst publishes this new zine in co-operation with the Chesley Donovan Science Fantasy Foundation (an active group in the Los Angeles area).

This zine is photo-offset, an ambitious process for a new undertaking. Its editors state that they are mainly interested in "working together on various science-fictional projects, mostly along the audio-visual line." This issue of their zine, though, is more or less straight fan, with quite a bit of fiction.

Clifford Alexander and Ron Cobb have a story, "First Lesson in Cosmography," which reverts to the pre-Copernican cosmos of a literally star-studded bowl of a sky. They even utilize a footnote to explain that the idea really isn't theirs, but borrowed. . .

Paul Arran's "Stars" also runs to the trick ending, but here he's got a novel twist. Your alien invaders-of-Earth accidentally have the same insignia on their ships as that of a potential Earth enemy. So their attack starts an intra-Earthmen war. I can't quite see it working out that way, but who knows?

Then there's a column by Mr. S-F, or 4e, or (for the newcomers) Forrest Ackerman.

The photo-offset process here is somewhat blurred in spots, and the artwork doesn't reproduce too clearly. It's an ambitious zine, with room for a big improvement;

still, it doesn't demand a lot of money. It's one that could grow, both in size and in content matter.

Rating: 5

* * *

OBLIQUE: 15c; Clifford Gould, 1559 Cable St., San Diego 7, Calif. The first thing you notice about this one is Russell Hickman's cover. If it weren't photo-offset you'd say it showed a good use of white space; as it is, it's a comparatively uncluttered use of black. (The editorial explains the duplication process, but I'm sure it can't be as involved as it's made out to be.)

The zine itself is dittoed (on a flat-bed ditto, according to the editor.) Among the contents there's a story by Cliff Gould, a satire on Matheson. "Born Into Fandom" is really a lot of fun, and throughout it holds the style of the original.

Dann Ross writes on science fiction; he seems somewhat surprised that fans find enough in it to set up a fandom. Odd-what attracted him to a typewriter and ditto?

Peter Vorzimer's "A Fannish Duty" is that of the Big Name Fan to the new fanzine.

The zine runs to a lot of subjects, including jazz, and is quite well balanced. It's slim, however, and the interior format could be much improved (interior art is poor, and the unjustified copy, purple ink on pink paper, doesn't look too good).

Rating: 6.

* * *

TRIODE: 10c or 9d; American representative, Dale R. Smith,

3001 Kyle Ave., Minneapolis, Minn. British subscriptions to Eric Bentcliffe, 47 Alldis St., Great-moor, Stockport, Cheshire, England.

This is one of those British zines that can be so darned hard to classify. Humorous? Yes—but how can you list it as humor when it carries such serious (and to overseas fans, such informative) articles as this one does? There's the argument among Ken Slater, Bert Campbell, and Ted Carnell over British postage regulations as applied to the professional science fiction market. In Great Britain, I learn, subscription copies are mainly given as a convenience for the subscribers in out-of-the-way places; there's no reduction in price over the news-

stand price. (In fact, the subscriber has to pay the postage).

This then is a serious fanzine? With Walt Willis running around loose in the middle of the Atlantic, giving the final turn to the "Who Sawed Courtenay's Boat?" bit?

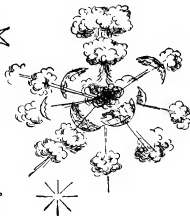
Format isn't too good. But the contents page reads like a roster of British fandom. The articles cover everything from Haunted Houses to Hazard Billiards.

Rating: 3

* * *

Well, that's all the fanzines for this time. Remember, if you have a fanzine you want reviewed, send it to me, Mari Wolf, Fandora's Box, IMAGINATION, Box 230, Evanston, Ill. See you next time...

—Mari Wolf



LUTHER

"Okay, pay me the ten Fbrylksn!"

Letters from the Readers

GEORGE O's SLANG!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Here's the way HIGHWAYS IN HIDING stacked up with me after reading the four-part serial (March thru June issues).

George O. Smith is above all a master storyteller. He creates true suspense. HIGHWAYS was well-plotted, had believable (if not life-like) characters, and showed imagination of a high, yet logical order.

My one criticism is Smith's use of slang throughout the novel. I don't mean slang in the dialogue; that's necessary for realism. I mean slang in the narration. The first person angle allows the author to use some slang, but the slang must be kept within the limits set up by the teller's education and environment. I doubt if the hero of HIGHWAYS would use the phrase accredited to him by "his" account.

The main reason I didn't approve of Smith's slang is that I'm a square and I didn't dig what he was talking about all the time. However, Smith's goal was to tell

an exciting science fiction story, and I think he succeeded admirably. The slang just gave it a flippant tone I didn't especially care for.

Victor Paananen
1148 W. 8th St.
Ashtabula, Ohio

You're probably referring to such narration as, "I just went out and got into my car and sloped." Well, "sloped" may not be in the dictionary, but the inference was fairly plain: "I smuck the hell outta there!" . . . But seriously, George's occasional use of slang sort of added a personal touch, we thought. Aside from that, however, we agree with you—it was an excellent novel! with

SECURITY RISK?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

In the June issue of *Madge*, Frank M. Robinson (Introducing the Author) states, "Think Oppenheimer got a raw deal."

The question arises, therefore, as to whether we are to condone Dr. Oppenheimer, or any public figure for that matter, who uses

whatever prominence he has gained as a sounding board for beliefs and actions which may be questionable to the security and welfare of his country.

Many of Dr. Oppenheimer's apologists, such as Edward R. Murrow, to name one, have, in the guise of impartiality, given only the Oppenheimer side of the picture.

Dr. Oppenheimer has, at least up until his firing as a security risk, consorted with known communists, contributed large sums of money to communist causes, lied under oath, and admitted to not even having read the newspapers until he was over thirty.

In addition, his wife and brother are communists.

None of this detracts from Dr. Oppenheimer's brilliance as a scientist; it seems reasonable though to understand why the government would not be willing to trust a man of such questionable character and associations with its secrets.

Mr. Robinson further states, " . . . Politicians who talk about any kind of existence other than 'peaceful co-existence'—in other words war—are dangerous men and scientifically illiterate."

Although not a politician, I too must fall under the category of being "dangerous and scientifically illiterate," since in my opinion, "peaceful co-existence"—communist style—is a form of war being waged by the Soviets.

Byron Rowe
941 Intervale Ave.
Bronx 59, N. Y.

The phrase, "security risk" is batted about all too freely these days, we fear. To many people

the fact that a person may have innocently engaged in conversation with a "communist" over a discussion of the weather would automatically brand that person as a security risk. In the case of Dr. Oppenheimer, the public has been given very little of what must indeed be "the whole story". The statements you make are part of what has been said in various segments of the national press in regard to the case. But this does not necessarily make them true! Remember, in this country a man is innocent until proven guilty. And in any event, Oppenheimer has not been accused of traitorous acts or deeds; his guilt, if any, lies in the realm of idealistic thinking.—

And again, our country guarantees freedom of thought! We might remind you of the irony of social condemnation; a few years back during the Big War, some national news commentators spoke in glowing terms of the victories being won by our Soviet comrades—while today they give the commies hell (about time!) and yet nobody questions their former friendly attitude. Forsooth, war makes strange bed-fellows! . . . It does seem a shame to us that our country is not utilizing one of the great minds of the century—Oppenheimer—a man who was instrumental in giving this country its greatest technological achievement, atomic power . . . Perhaps Frank Robinson will answer your various comments himself in our next issue . . . wkh

REALISTIC CHARACTER

Dear Bill:

The May Madge was grand. Ray

C. Noll's FLIGHT PERILOUS was a good story. I got to know Fred Hiller—the hero—from the first word of the story. Funny, but it seemed as if I had met him in real life rather than in a science fiction story!

Continue those cartoons. A few laughs pep a reader up!

James W. Ayers
609 First St.
Attalla, Ala.

One of the marks of being a good writer is injecting realism into characters. Glad you think Noll did a good job. And he's new to the field as you may have noted; we predict he'll be a top-notch before too long wh

GAL WITH VARIED INTERESTS

Dear Ed:

I have read *Madge* for several years and enjoy it very much, although you and I do not always agree . . . especially on things like 4 part serials! I usually read a book a day in my spare time, and it just kills me to wait four months to finish a story!

The main purpose of this letter is to request pen-pals—preferably young ladies over 16; I am 19. It isn't that I dislike the opposite sex—quite the contrary—I just find them difficult to correspond with; they tend to forget that we females do not always understand many of the finer points of rocket propulsion, 3-stage rockets, escape velocity, and escape orbits. (I'd welcome the chance to learn!)

I have many varied interests such as; science fiction, cooking, science fiction, tropical fish, science fiction, cats, science fiction, writing

letters, and science fiction.

Patricia Mauldin
1235 Alabama Ave.
Huntington Beach, Calif.

Why don't you take up a really interesting hobby, Pat, such as—science fiction? wh

MATTER OF TASTE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Have for a long time found that I do not agree with your book reviewer, Henry Bott. Must add that this does not make his reviews any less interesting to read. However, I find that L. Sprague de Camp's very literate letter in your May issue expresses my viewpoint very well.

My husband and I have read *Madge* for a good many years. For that matter, we read nearly every magazine in the field. As Val Walker once mentioned in your letter column, there is a friendly atmosphere about IMAGINATION. I'm sure that it is the facet of its personality that would make me loath to miss many copies. That and the cartoons! I always enjoy them. I have the feeling that I would enjoy you people very much even though our reading tastes differ greatly.

I have always felt that a person's favorite magazine would be the one whose editors' reading tastes most nearly agreed with that person's. For instance, my husband and I feel that John Campbell's taste in *Astounding* agrees with ours. There are, of course, readers who feel that you excell in that department; there are others who prefer Gold, Boucher—or Palmer! It certainly makes for variety in

reading pleasures.

This may explain in part why I am not one of Henry Bott's admirers. However, I feel the reviewer has a particularly hard job. Nearly all critics seem to get overly cynical and critical of the material they review. They seem to reach a saturation point. I think this is a very human and natural thing—though a little hard on authors!

Mrs. L. R. Foos
1334 Las Lomas St.
Yuma, Ariz.

Glad you like the friendly atmosphere in Madge. It will remain that way; Reading tastes? Come to think of it, we rather like Astounding too—along with Madge, of course! As to critics being hard on authors—that's part of their job, if an author warrants it...wlh

ST. REYNARD COMING UP!

Dear Bill:

I am fifteen years old and have been reading science fiction for only a year. In that time I have come to a definite conclusion: Madge is the greatest!

But say, what's happened to Geoff St. Reynard? Let's have more stories by him!

Richard Hill
970 S. Oxford

Grosse Pointe Woods, Mich.

By a wonderful coincidence, Geoff is hard at work on a new novel for Madge. You'll see it soon . . . wlh

MAD AT RAP

Dear Bill:

Here is one letter I doubt if you ever print, for obvious reasons.

As you probably know, *Other*

Worlds has been reborn. Here are some quotes from its editor, Ray Palmer: ". . . forget stf and put your dough into sex books! We'll make a mint! Everybody loves naked pictures!" Recognize it? It was your (alleged) answer to Ray Palmer when he asked you for information on how to make stf a respected literature.

Now here's a quote that really makes me mad: "This is no plug for Bill Hamling's IMAGINATION. His rag is a plain out and out half-hearted stab at naked pitchers!" Unquote.

Madge is ten times better than *Other Worlds*—either the new or the old! Here's another quote: "Bill Hamling's stories stink."

I can't answer this because I never read a story by you—but if he means your magazine all I can

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say is I dislike Ray Palmer completely for saying such things.

After reading this I imagine you're as mad as I am!

Michael R. Krakomberger
183 East St.
Buffalo 7, N. Y.

We had read the various items you quoted from Rap's newly revived OW. What you don't know, Mike, is that Ray is a great kiddier. We may not always approve of his idea of having fun, but fun it is. For example, here's a direct quote from a card we received from Palmer a day or so before we journeyed up to his Wisconsin farm for a weekend visit: "The elephant pits are dug, the bitter hemlock is being brewed, crumbs are being loaded into the beds, rock salt into the blunderbuss, trees are being sawed almost through to crash down at the slightest touch, roadblocks are being set up, neighbors alerted to shoot strangers on sight, and in general, we are looking forward to your visit with a great deal of anticipation and unholy glee. We have secured steaks from a 26-year old cow who has been operating a treadmill geared to an irrigation system for toadstools of the most virulent variety. If the toadstools don't get you the steaks will. Welcome to Utopia! . . . Ray" . . . Needless to say we survived our visit—and plan on getting up Ray's way again soon. All that talk about naked pitchers is simply a defense-mechanism on Ray's part. He'd drop dead with fright in the presence of an unclad female! But as Ray would say—what a pleasant way to die! . . . with

BRAVO TO YOU TOO!

Dear Bill:

This is my first letter to any editor, so I'm not sure just how to say my piece, but after reading all the stf mags on the market for the past two years, I have one big word for *Madge*: BRAVO! It's really the best—from cover to cover.

I have just completed the 4-part serial in the June issue, *HIGHWAYS IN HIDING* by George O. Smith. I rate it as one of your finest stories. The theme and idea of the novel were terrific. More Smith, please!

Hope you continue with top grade reading in future issues. Along these lines, I'd like to see Isaac Asimov represented!

Robert V. Hill, Jr. IM2
Supply & Fiscal
P. O. Box 156
Naval Air Station
Patuxent River, Md.

Asimov hasn't submitted a story to us for consideration, although he's hinted at doing so a number of times. As for George O. Smith, the lad's supposed to be turning out a new epic for Madge. Huh, George? . . . with

GOOD ENTERTAINMENT!

Dear Bill:

I'm not much of a letter hack, but I would like to tell you what I think of *Madge*.

I have read science fiction for 15 of my 30 years. *Madge* is the best on the stands. I don't care for the type of stories featured in *Galaxy*, *Astounding*, or *Fantasy & Science Fiction*. I used to read all of these but have long since stopped buying them. I want to be enter-

tained—not educated! If you ever start printing the dry rot turned out by these other mags you'll lose me for a reader.

I'd also like to cast my vote for long stories—even if they take up a whole issue! Short stories are hardly worth the trouble to read them. On covers, *Madge's* are second to none. Please keep McCauley busy with his "Mac" girls!

Ned Reece

Rt. 3, Box 68-A
Kannapolis, N. C.

Plenty of long stories scheduled for coming issues, Ned. And McCauley will be on hand with some terrific new covers in months to come wh

HAPPY BLAST-OFFS!

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Just finished the June issue of *Madge*. As usual, the magazine lived up to my expectations.

Sorry to see **HIGHWAYS IN HIDING** end. It was an excellent serial.

Always enjoy the cartoons—especially the Hairy BEM series by Scheffy. And Happy Blast Offs!

W. C. Brandt

1725 Seminary Ave.

Apt. 21

Oakland 21, Calif.

Scheffy's cartoons are very popular, and the lad's keeping us well supplied. Which about winds up shop for this issue gang. Incidentally, why not turn the page and do some additional writing—your name on our subscription list!

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TOMORROW'S SCIENCE

NEBULA IN BOOTES: Striking interstellar photo shows remarkable resemblance of nebula to shape of "flying saucers" as generally depicted in science fiction and elsewhere. Picture was taken with 60 inch telescope.

Another scan
by
cape1736

